

Aug 24
Augustine Maria
Compositae.

This I first saw in its wild state near Tracca, but Auguste found it in the Woods near the old House at East Point. It is a pretty old fashioned plant and much cultivated in the gardens of the European accident, blossoming in the months of June, July.





Thak
Bishigaon

17.3.77



designed

*New England's first publication
for the South Asian diaspora*

d̄esi

Desi is the ethnonym of the people, cultures, and products of the Indian subcontinent and their diaspora. The term is derived from the Sanskrit word: *deśá*, meaning ‘land or country’ and hence, *desi* means ‘of the homeland.’ It signifies a deep connection to the motherland—the ancient cultures, traditions and identities that transcend the bounds of modern geopolitical borders, unconstrained by any single nationality, language, or religion.

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The nomenclature is endonymic: that is, a self-appellation. It traces its origin specifically to the nations of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh; however, in recent years, it has been more widely used across South Asia, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

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South Asia is more than a geopolitical center for colonial power: it is a diverse confluence of rich cultural exchange and shared traditions across nationalities and regions. *desi-gned* is an exploration of the unbelievable vibrancy of art and design from the subcontinent, curated and created by a group of students that identify as South Asian.

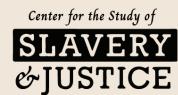
This publication was created within the colonial structures of *Brown University*, *Rhode Island School of Design* and *Yale University* — institutions that are located on the ancestral and contemporary homelands of the *Narragansett*, *Wampanoag*, *Nipmuc*, *Quinnipiac*, *Paugussett*, and *Wappinger* Nations. In studying and thinking about art and design in English and within a dominant Western European academic tradition, we legitimize a global colonial power structure. These institutions and industries are responsible for many injustices, both past and ongoing, which include slavery and race prejudice.

We are committed to work together to honor this past and build a future that champions greater acknowledgement, accessibility, and inclusivity towards peoples and perspectives from all cultures, backgrounds, and traditions.

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Through *desi-gned*, we have consciously attempted to balance our obligation to illuminate South Asia's cultural riches without yielding to the impulse to auto-exoticise. Like 'diaspora,' 'auto-exoticism' is a contested term in postcolonial theory; here, we simply define it as the process of exoticizing the self. In telling the stories of these eight nations—with both our South Asian and non-South Asian audience in mind—we must resist the urge to fetishize, aestheticise or glorify, to traffic in stereotypes about their people and traditions to augment their allure. Admittedly, the cultural and epistemological dynamics of exoticism are complex.

We cannot control the reception of our work just as we can never fully cast aside the Western lens that mediates our diasporic vision. All we can do is acknowledge the crisis of authenticity involved in cultural projects like ours with humility, and respond with a plurality of voices. Verisimilitude cannot be found in any singular narrative of South Asia—and we don't claim to have reached any level of the same. While this publication is an amalgamation of the range of lived and represented experiences and perspectives that we bring, our hope is to provide a greater diversity of voices in subsequent issues. *desi-gned* is an open space for all: reach out to work with us!

Editor's Note

Being South Asian is much more than being from one of the eight countries that comprise the South Asian geopolitical area—it involves intergenerational legacies of human confluence and ingenuity.

Historically, from the Turks to the Europeans, the allure of the boundless topography of South Asia and its bounty was irresistible to all. Through centuries of migration, cohabitation, and innovation, South Asia became a melting pot of cultures and peoples. As such, being South Asian does not designate its descendants with a single religion, language or nationality, but rather bestows upon them a broader cultural paradigm.

It is in attempting to retell this diverse history—a history that has been largely oral and local—that so much has been distorted and homogenized, forgotten and lost. If South Asia is an anthology of human tales, then a majority of its tales have been unwritten.

We aim to conjure these sprawling cultural legacies of South Asia in the pages of this publication, but we cannot ignore the physical geography in which this work was conceived. Its pieces were discussed, written and edited in English, within the cloisters of two archetypical colonial-era institutions that have defined the character of New England. Bringing this to you is a product of our privilege, but a privilege that is coloured by colonial memory. Yearning to study the history and culture of the countries we come from, in the language that has supplanted our native tongue is our burden of colonialism. It is an inherited history that we grapple with every day.

Even in striving for authenticity, we are shackled by the demands of translation, in implicit dialogue with Western conceptions of our homelands. It is in longing for truth, for greater accuracy, caught between distinct cultural traditions, that we share in a traditionally ‘diasporic’ experience. In celebrating our homelands, we recreate rituals, histories and mythologies that feel more distant than we would like them to.

Here, we center native terminology as a movement in the reclamation of the histories, traditions, and identities that have endured generations of erasure; we act on reviving print and consider the contribution of physical knowledge archives in the persistence of information and memory in human spaces; we subvert conventional methods of knowledge transmission and creative expression by providing more accessible, equitable, and sustainable means for knowing; and we attempt to give you a glimpse of the marvel that is South Asia.

Now, I bring to you *desi-gned*: a humble compilation of these living archives of our peoples and places. This is a hand-selected compendium of ingenious craftsmanship, subaltern histories, and current contemplations, of untold stories that *need* to be shared.

I hope you derive as much joy from reading this labor of love, as we did in creating and curating it for you.

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All my very best,



Yukti V. Agarwal



Editor's Note

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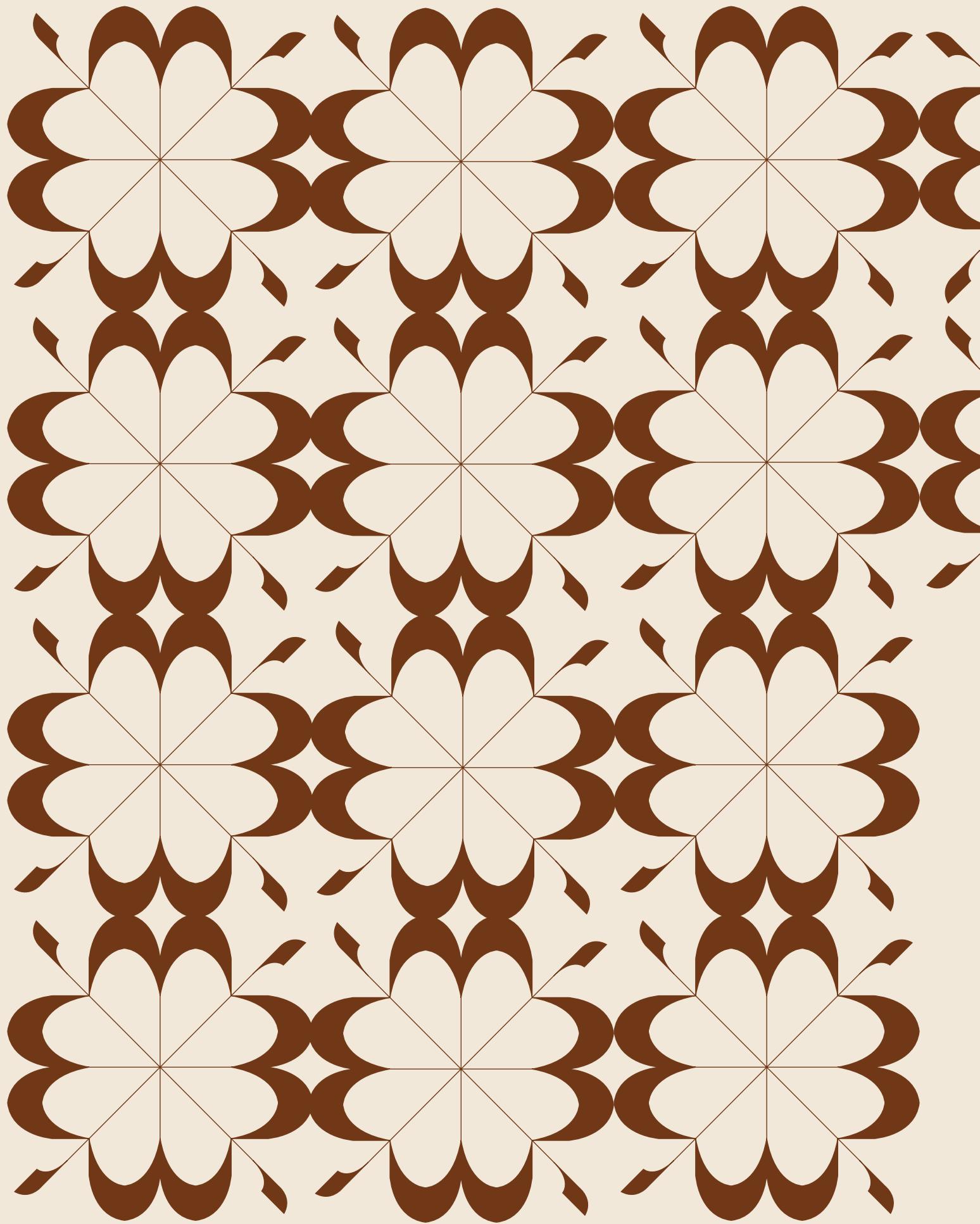
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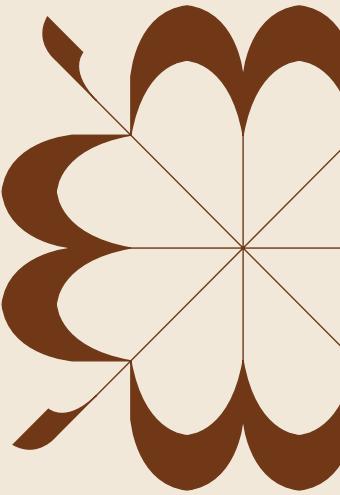
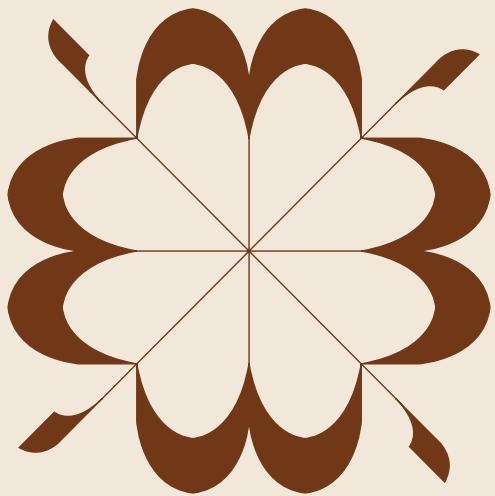
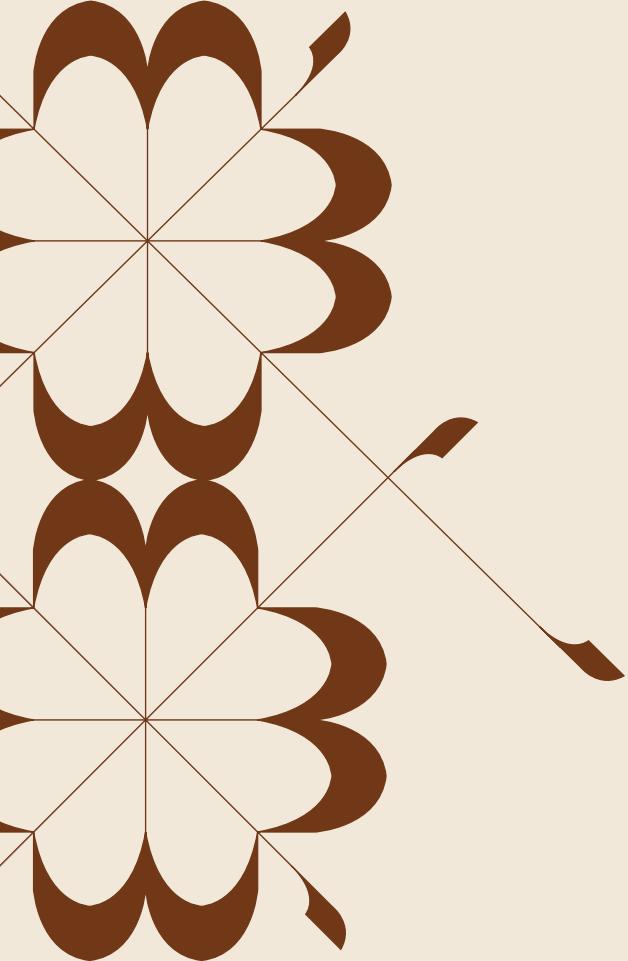
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Material Memories





*Jamawar Length,
Kashmiri, late 1800s,
Pashm (goat hair),
Kani weave. Image
Credit: The Museum
of Art, Rhode Island
School of Design*

January—September 2021

The Aldrich Gallery

The Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

material memories

*Curated by Yukti V. Agarwal (Brown | RISD
Dual Degree '24) under the guidance of
Kate Irvin (Curator of Costume and Textiles)*

The Jamawar and its Journey

First traded across Persia and South Asia, intricately woven *jamawar* textiles are reservoirs of collective memory. This exhibit focuses on five examples created between 1800 and 1900—before these highly prized textiles were colonized for the European market. These works demonstrate the versatility of *jamawars* and the various ways they are used to shroud the body. Through the *jamawar*, we can trace human expansion, cultural migration, and the evolution of design across the Asian subcontinent.

Jamawar fabric is densely patterned with arabesque interlocking vines and floral motifs. These styles first originated in Persia in the 1400s, traveling across South Asia with the army of the Mughal emperor Babur. These patterns evolved to suit the tastes of patrons of the princely states in South Asia, the Persian elite, and later, European colonizers. Adopted by skilled weavers in Kashmir, these extravagant designs were highly prized by the new rulers of the region and other foreigners. Persian aesthetics softly pulsate on the surface of Kashmiri *jamawars*, textiles woven from *pashm* (goat hair) and traded around the globe.

Pashm into Pashmina

Produced in the region between India and Pakistan, Kashmiri *pashmina* is special for its fine materials and painstaking process. *Pashmina* is the cloth woven from *pashm*, the wool of rare *Changthangi* goats, which live high in the Himalayan mountains. From hand-combing the fibers to spinning the yarn and making the fabric in a fine *kani* weave, the process of creating a length of *pashmina* contains a history of arduous effort undertaken by generations of Kashmiri craftspeople. *Pashmina*'s softness and its immense utility in harsh cold make it a material coveted by many.

Pashmina patterns changed with Mughal expansion in the 1500s and later with British colonialism. With each new group of people who called the South Asian subcontinent home, Kashmiri weaving evolved, while remaining rooted in a wildly arabesque aesthetic.



A Shaul Goat, ca.1779, Calcutta, opaque watercolor on paper, attributed to 'Company School' artist Zayn al-Din from the Impey Album of animals and plants of India.
Image Credit: Victoria and Albert Museum



Conversations between Persia and Kashmir

The confluence of artistic traditions contained in the evolution of *jamawar* textiles makes them a poignant locus for investigating how cultures and histories from all around the world intersected in South Asia. The floral motifs found in *jamawars* testify to the passion and love that both the Mughals and the Persians shared for the garden and all things natural. Dense Persian imagery, as defined by Mughal tastes, was incorporated into *pashminas*. This posed a design challenge for the Kashmiri weavers, who historically made tapestries.

Kashmiri craftspeople spend years working collaboratively in independent workshops to make a single length of *jamawar*. Instead of embroidering or brocading floral patterns onto a continuous ground, weavers use the *kani* weave. In this laborious tapestry-weaving technique, colored yarns are woven into the pattern area and interconnected with neighboring yarns, increasing the strength and structural integrity of the fabric. This process makes *jamawar* fabrics unusually lightweight, despite the extravagance and opulence of their designs. Although *jamawars* are still handwoven in Kashmir today, mechanically produced facsimiles of the fabric are now much more popular due to their significantly lower prices.

The story of the *jamawar*'s influence in the Kashmir valley, and on the topography of the *pashmina*, is only a partial narrative—its reach was much wider. New design sensibilities and techniques were integrated into the weaves of other textiles across the South Asian subcontinent. Through travel and trade, this new craft found its way back to Persia.

Forms the *Jamawar* Takes

Beginning in Persia, the *jamawar* was wrapped along the axis of the body as a *choga* (an open coat, usually for men), a *patka* (sash), or a *dastar* (turban). When it traveled to South Asia, the *jamawar* was worn not only as clothing expressing the wealth and high status of royal patrons of the Mughal courts, but also as shawls that held the same social weight as more elaborate garments.

Jamawars provide great warmth to the wearer while signifying immense wealth—qualities that continue to keep these vibrant textiles popular across the South Asian subcontinent. Today the traditional practice of weaving *jamawars* is a dying craft practiced by a select few. This versatile textile continues to be redefined by contemporary designers who are exploring what it means to be clad in a *jamawar*.

The following pages illustrate the various uses of the *Jamawar* through its history.



Portrait of Ishwari Sen of Mandi with an orange Kashmiri shawl worn as a patka (belt) and draped over the arm ca.1825, opaque watercolor on paper. Image Credit: Victoria and Albert Museum

Aminul of Ranjeet Singh, Rajah of Lahore

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Portrait of Sayyid Mirza Azim Beg, the Jagirdar (landowner) of Hansi, draped in a Kashmiri shawl, 1820–1825, attributed to Ghulam Ali Khan, opaque watercolor on paper. Image Credit: Victoria and Albert Museum



Jamawar
as a garment

Choga (Man's Robe), Kashmiri, late 1800s
Pashm (goat hair) *kani* weave (double
interlocking twill tapestry weave)
Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.263

This densely patterned open coat is an example of a Kashmiri woven *jamawar* textile fashioned into a garment. Adorned here with an all-over pattern of *ambis* (mango-shaped motifs), pomegranates, and flowers, the *choga* was a robe popularized in the Mughal courts of South Asia. The presence of flowers from the Persian landscape, including tulips, irises, and lilies, indicates a design migration between Persia and South Asia. *Jamawars* were typically woven in Kashmir and assembled into exquisite garments in Persia. While this garment might have been made for a South Asian patron, its Persian aesthetics make it a rich example of cultural and material exchange.



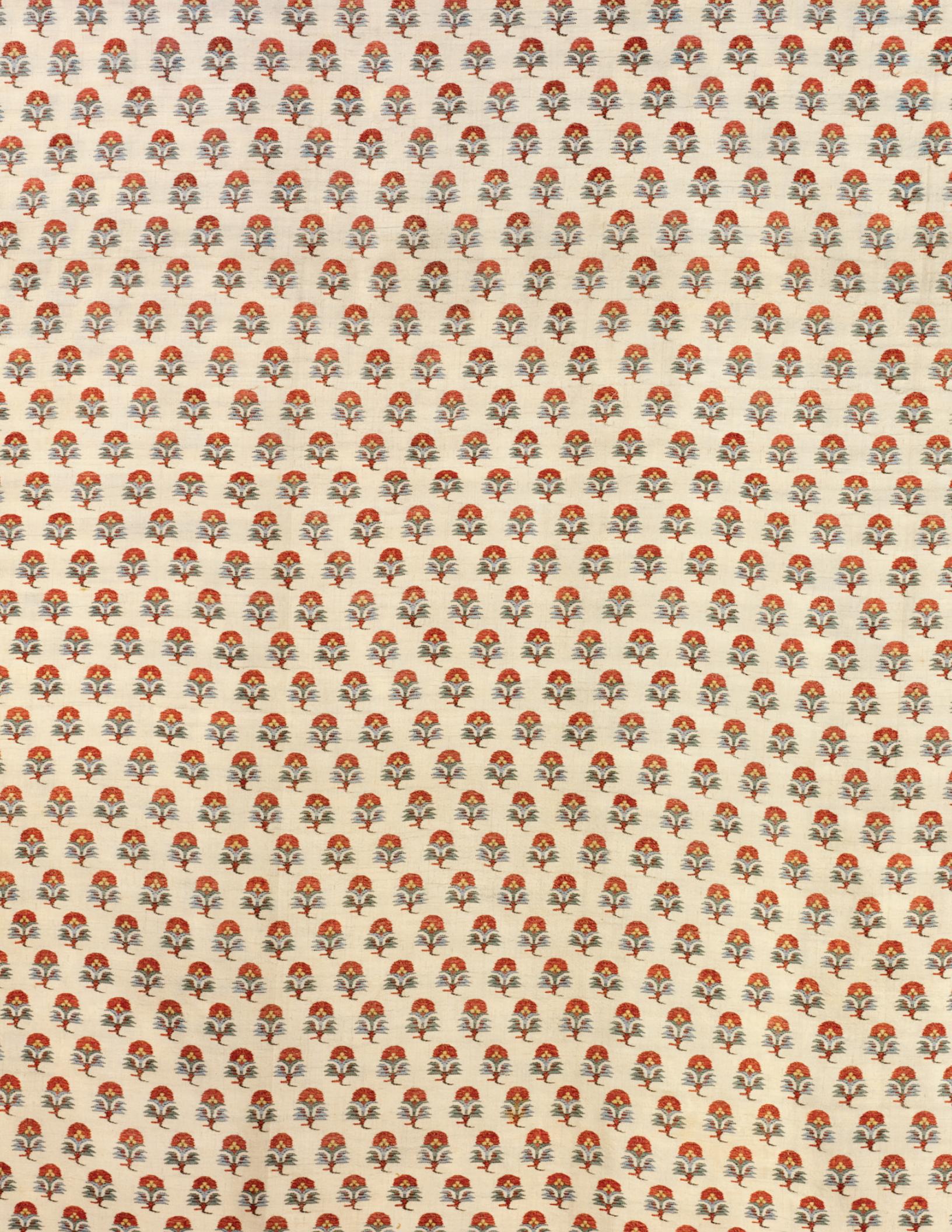


Jamawar as yardage

Jamawar Length, Kashmiri, late 1800s
Pashm (goat hair) kani weave (double
interlocking twill tapestry weave)
Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.329

This striking length of *jamawar* fabric presents a lattice arrangement of stylized floral motifs—primarily carnations splayed in the Afghan style. Two pieces have been carefully sewn together here, with a *pallu* (border) on one end and an unfinished edge on the other. A signature, as yet undeciphered but presumably in an Indo-Iranian language, can be seen on the left, below the *pallu*. This length was made for constructing garments. The thin *pallu* was perhaps intended to delineate a garment's center opening or lower edge. Use of the *pallu* as a demarcating border in clothing design was common practice. It also can be seen in the center opening in the previously pictured *jamawar choga*.







Jamawar
as the *matan*
of a shawl

Jamawar Length (Perhaps the Matan of a Shawl), Kashmiri, early 1800s
Pashm (goat hair) *kani* weave (double interlocking twill tapestry weave)
Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.336

The undyed ivory ground of this lightweight *jamawar* textile length is unusual. Poppy flowers uniformly repeat in a half-drop continuous pattern reminiscent of Kashmiri *matandar* shawls, which employ the density of *jamawar* design not only in the *pallu* (border) but also in the *matan* (central field). Because *jamawars* used for clothing do not usually repeat a single motif, it is unclear whether this textile was made as yardage for a garment or intended to be the garment itself. A signature that closely resembles the Indic *swastika*—an ancient, life-affirming symbol—can be found in the lower left corner. Embroidered above is a more ornate gold signature (presumably of a trader), currently untranslated from Arabic or Urdu.

Jamawar as a shawl

Jamawar Shawl, late 1800s–early 1900s
Pashm (goat hair) kani weave (double
interlocking twill tapestry weave)
Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.332

This *jamawar* is an assemblage of five different pieces of fabric. The length of this textile indicates it was worn as a shawl, though it is possible it was originally intended to be made into a tailored garment. An ovoid pattern with distinct *botehs* (floral bouquets) dominates its vibrant *matan* (central field). The multicolored fringe tabs suggest the finishing technique used for European *cashmere* shawls manufactured on jacquard looms. However, this fringe features floral bouquets embroidered in the Kashmiri *sozni* style typical of *dorukha palledar* (double-faced shawl). The fringe, bright colors, and sinuous floral motifs echo the early 20th-century aesthetics of *jamawars* produced in the Greater Punjab region.









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Jamawar as a patka

Patka (Sash), Persian, 1840-1875

Silk-wrapped and gold-wrapped thread compound weave; continuous and discontinuous supplementary weft patterning

Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.529

This sash, or *patka*, is a prime example of the grandeur of *jamawar* textiles. *Patkas* displayed wealth and status, especially for Persian and Mughal men, who tucked daggers and other material symbols of power and wealth into them. *Patkas* were usually wrapped around the waist two or three times and worn over a *jama* (coat). As a *jamawar* that was not woven in Kashmir but in Persia, this textile narrates a story of trade. Its gold silk ground shimmers, densely overlaid with floral designs contained within the *ambi* (mango-shaped motif). Westernized paisley motifs derive from the *ambi*.





The Dowry of the Dhurrie

*Adapted from Bridal Durries of India by
Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego: the only
other print archive of this hidden craft.*

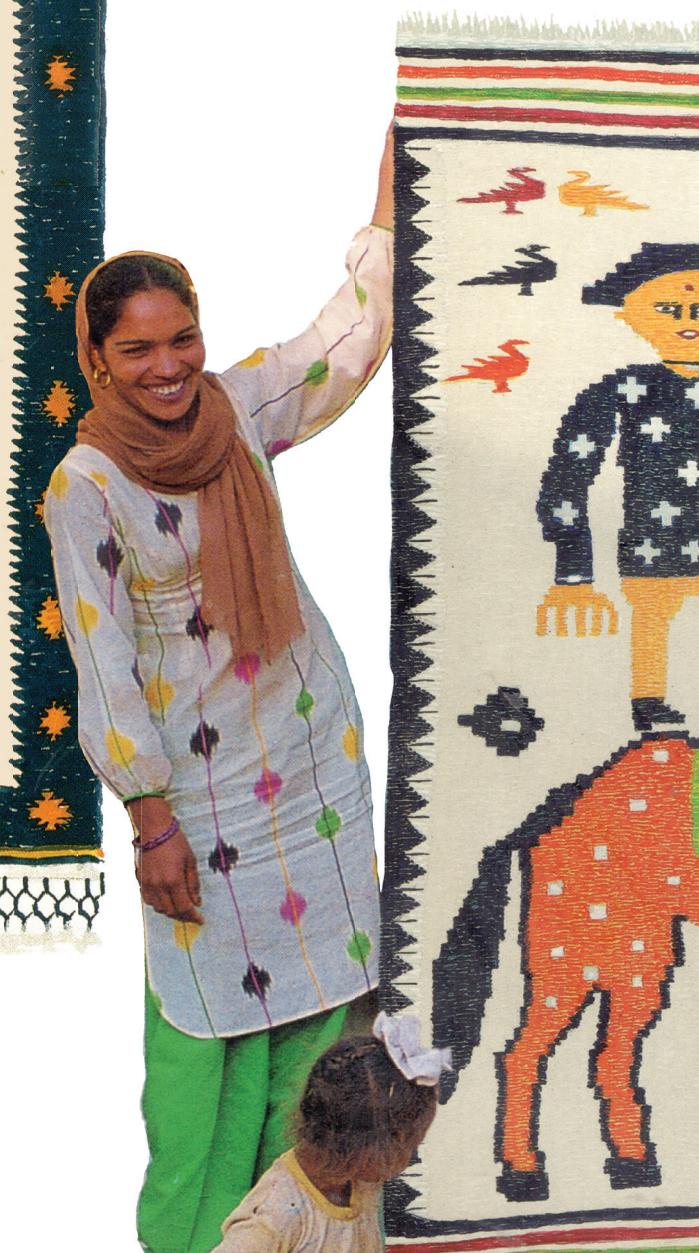
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Weavers with a dhurrie woven in Khusa Ali Sher village, Union Territory of Chandigarh, 1995. Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego

The Dhurrie —

Dhurries are woven carpets, which originated from the valleys around India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Burma. They are commonly used as floor rugs around the world, but in South Asia, they are also used as bed covers, wall-screens and wall-hangings. The term *dhurrie* itself is considered native to the Indian subcontinent; the language spoken by Zoroastrian Iranis, commonly called the *Parsees* (who arrived as refugees to India, in 936 AD), is called *Dari*, and is similar to the Persian dialect spoken in parts of Afghanistan.

Dar means ‘door’ in Persian and Urdu, and many speculate that *Dari* could mean ‘of the door,’ as dhurries were often used as wall-screens hung over doorways and rolled up as needed. In the same way *Farshi*, large floor dhurries, derive their name from *farsh*, which means ‘floor’ in Urdu. It might even be derived from the word *dori*, which means ‘thread’ or ‘string’ in Urdu. This would refer to the use of thick thread used to weave the *dhurrie*. No concrete origin of the term has yet been established.



The story of the *dhurrie* has traveled wide and far; from the remote villages of Rajasthan to the modern homes of the United States, flat-weave rugs have become a common household item around the world. These flat-weave rugs have far more humble beginnings than their global reach might suggest.

In the small villages of Haryana, Indian Punjab, and Pakistani Punjab, *dhurries* are often woven as a part of the dowry that travels with a girl to her bridal home. These ‘bridal *dhurries*,’ or ‘dowry *dhurries*,’ and the tradition of weaving them has been passed

on for centuries, and is the exclusive preserve of women. A girl is taught to weave by an older woman of the household—her mother, grandmother, paternal aunt, or sister—around the age of twelve. The passing down of the craft from one woman to the other is considered a sacred event, marking the maturation of the girl and her entry into womanhood. This practice is similar to other coming-of-age celebrations such as the Mexican quinceañera and the Jewish bar mitzvah.



Dhurrie depicting a pair of lions with human faces and tiger stripes surrounded by sparrows at either end. Thakora village, Ropar District, Punjab, 1974
Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego



Dhurrie with pairs of peacocks confronting a central plant, with a row of sparrows at either end.
Marakpur village, Ropar District, Punjab, 1980
Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego



Dhurrie with judwen tote (pairs of parakeets), and the name of the weaver's brother: Jasvir Singh, at the bottom. Mundi Kharar Village, Ropar District, Punjab, 1973. Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego



The process of weaving a *dhurrie* usually takes two to five years and is extremely labor-intensive. Unless she has younger sisters needing her help, the girl is unlikely to weave again until the time comes to teach her own daughters. The work is done with great pride and affection, for the product of her labour will be her life-long treasure.

The practice of dowry itself is one that propagates the patriarchy that characterises the institution of marriage in South Asia. Even today, dowries are widely prevalent in parts of South Asia, given by people of all stratas of society. However, the *dhurrie* represents a different avatar of dowry where the marriage gift given is not an offering of material wealth, but a robust exchange of tradition. The gifting of a bridal *dhurrie* symbolizes an affectionate labor of love that exhibits an abundance of creative skill and years of dedication. The dowry no longer seems to be a capitulation to male avarice, but rather a token of love and affection given from the bride to her groom.

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*Dhurrie with multicolored geometric design of serrated lozenges and other forms in colored bands.
Kansal village, Ropar District, Punjab, 1969
Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego*



The practice of exchanging crafts as a form of dowry is exclusive to South Asian countries. In fact, in many craft communities, dowries were historically considered to be a display of the bride's skill in traditional handicrafts. For example, the Rabari tribe of Kutch maintains the dowry tradition of *Moti Bharat*, which is the exchange of items which have been embroidered with glass beads. This rather chaste and immaterial form of dowry took away the stigma associated with the practice.

When one looks at a bridal *dhurrie*, it seems almost like a naturalistic canvas in which each hand-selected image has personal significance for the creator. The imagery ranges from small human figurines to domestic animals and specific flora which populates the region. Historically, the forms of these symbolic etchings seem to be inspired by a variety of topical events.



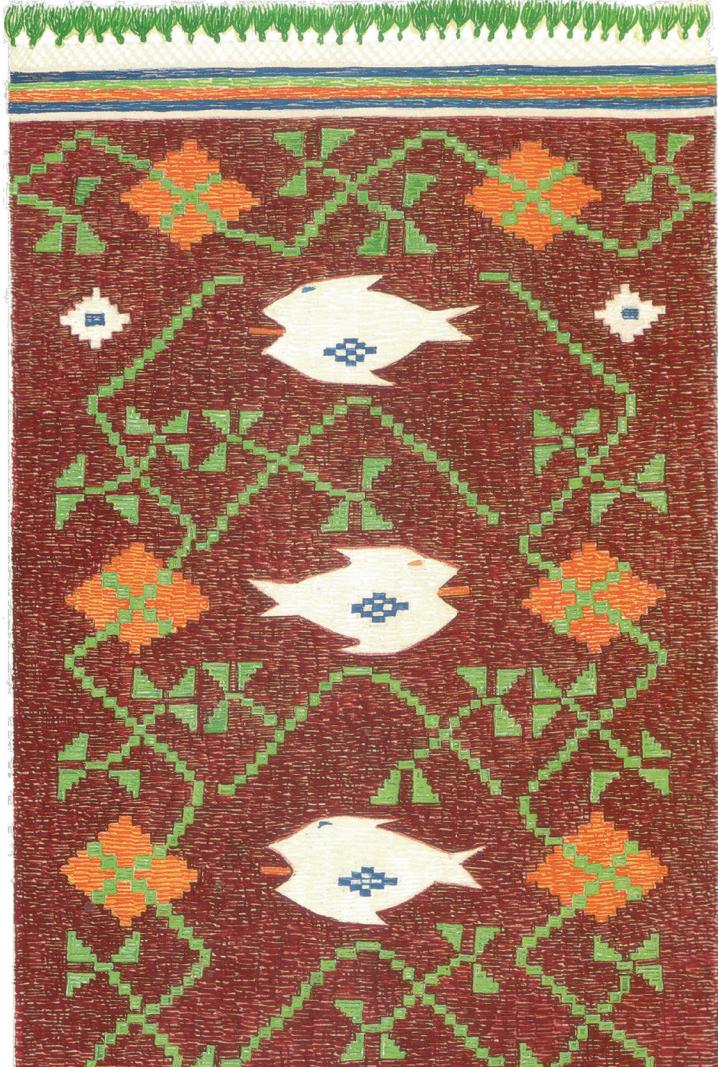
*Dhurries also reflected the traditional life in the villages where they were woven. A common symbol was that of the *guddian*, which translates to 'doll'. The symbol was a female figure, in a stylized form, carrying out her daily chores of carrying pots of water on her head with one arm raised to steady it and the other akimbo for balance. Religious portrayals of goddesses such as *Ganga*, the goddess of the river *Ganga*, and *Prithvi*, the goddess of the earth, would be often represented in a similar pose.*

*A woman weaving on a movable dhurrie loom made using water piping with a hatti (weaver's comb) situated on the left. Image Credit:
Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego*

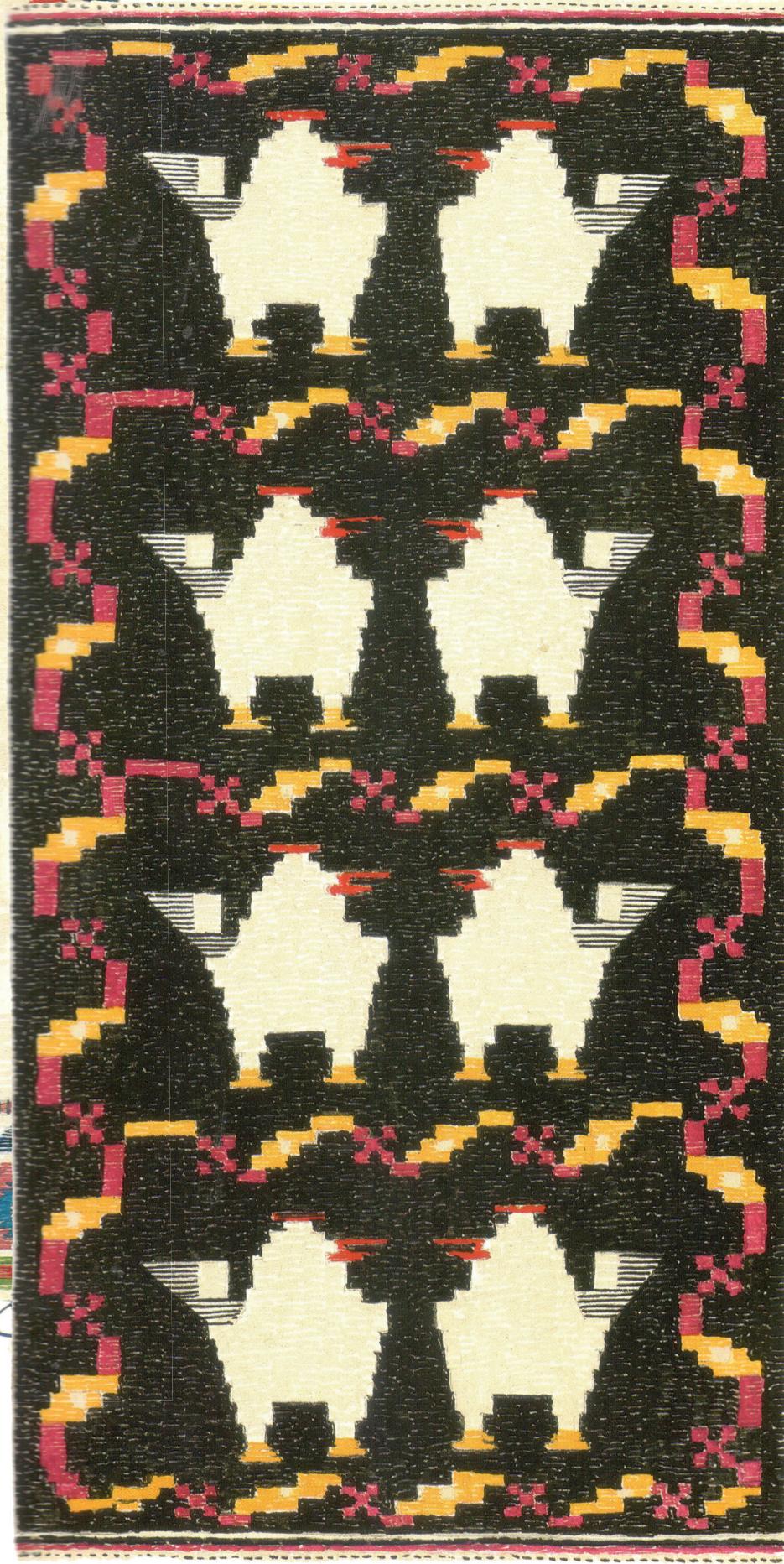


Bridal *dhurries* are typically adorned with the fauna of the native region: beautiful in their natural and stylistic simplicity. With clean rectilinear outlines, women deftly capture characteristic poses and fundamental qualities of many different species of birds and beasts of the region. The warmth of these women manifests in the way they depict animals around them. Animals sometimes have their favorite foods woven beside them: hares with cotton flowers, squirrels running up *kikar* trees and birds sitting in gardens with a little something to eat in their mouths. This empathy with animals has ancient roots. There are similar scenes painted on objects from the Indus Valley Civilization, such as pottery from *Chanhudaro*, on which goats nibble at trees; and copper tablets from *Mohenjo-daro*, which show hares feeding.

Dhurrie depicting a macchi jaal (fish in a lattice structure). Baraudi village, Ropar District, Punjab, 1986
Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego



Above
Dhurrie with pairs of deers facing each other. Hulka village, Patiala District, Punjab, 1969. Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego



Right
Dhurrie with pairs of cocks
facing each other. Dhanas
Village, Union Territory of
Chandigarh, 1990. Image
Credit: Ann Shankar and
Jenny Housego



From *dhurries* with European men marching into the Indian subcontinent, to *dhurries* with figures resembling the Harappan pottery figurines of the Indus River, bridal *dhurries* denote the political and cultural environment of the place and time in which they were created.

Particularly during the rule of the British Raj, tradition and transference of histories seemed to combine on the ever-evolving, fluid canvas of the *dhurries*. Weavers depicted figures such as smug, bored British *memsahibs* sitting on their straight chairs, sometimes drinking tea or holding flowers—the epitome of British colonial presence, seasoned with native humor.

Above
Detail of a dhurrie with
British *memsahibs* (madames).
Khudda Jassu village, Union
Territory of Chandigarh, 1975
Image Credit: Ann Shankar
and Jenny Housego

Today, when someone sees a *dhurrie*, they may see a mere floor-covering—a mundane household item. However, it is exceedingly important to understand the *dhurries*' origins as a powerful symbol of creative endeavors and a repository of material memory. Their history and character transcend their roles as sheer decorative objects—inducing an appreciation not only of the craft and arts of India but also a respect for the cultural history which is woven into the secular and deeply diverse fabric of South Asia.

Below

Detail of a *dhurrie* with a guddian (doll) depicted as a jago (female figure carrying a large oil lamp on their heads). Dhanas village, Union Territory of Chandigarh, 1990. Image Credit: Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego



Of the Naga

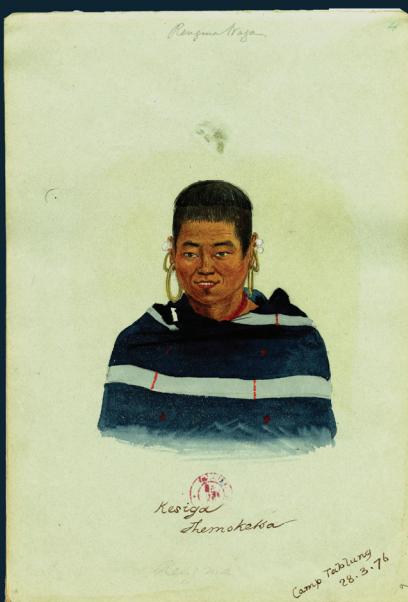
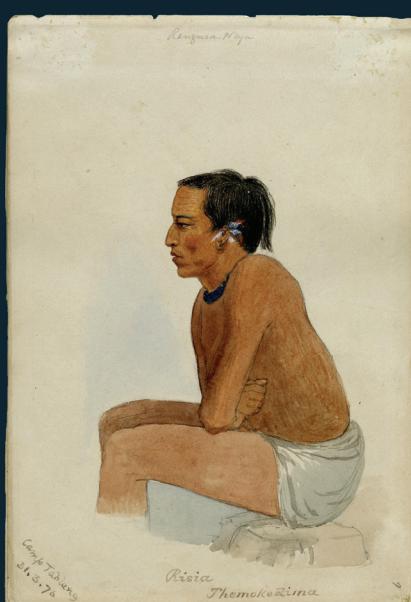
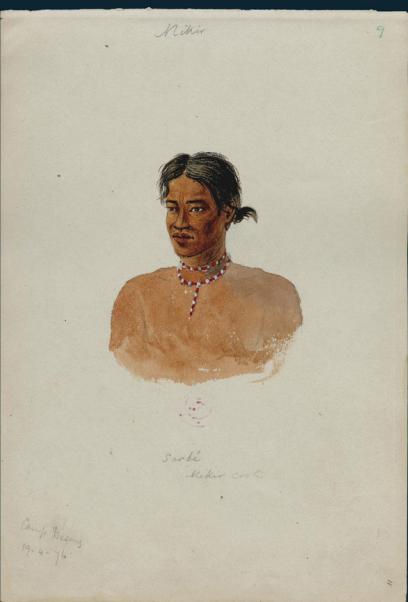
YVA



Situated in the Northeast mountains of India, Nagaland is home to sixteen prominent tribes. The word Naga originated from the Burmese 'naka,' meaning 'people with earrings.'

Woman's necklace of agate, glass, brass, shell, bone, and fiber, for the wife of a prominent man in the tribe, 19th - 20th century, Ao or Angami Naga. Image credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

The time-worn tradition of adorning oneself with jewelry has always held a greater significance than mere ornamentation in South Asia. From the Indus Valley Civilization to the Mughal era, jewelry was worn by men and women for sacred, social and aesthetic purposes. In Nagaland, jewelry is a demarcation of individual and tribe identity, one that is used to distinguish warriors and homemakers in society.



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These multicolored earrings, armlets, anklets, necklaces, headgear, and belts are made with materials such as carnelian beads, deomani glass beads, coral, bronze, boar tusks, shells, feathers, ivory, conch shells, cowries, and are widely worn in the region till date.



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Materials are imbued with symbolism and meaning—red beads, for example, indicate danger, blood, or fire; whereas tiger teeth symbolize courage and conquest. Carnelian and glass beads are considered to contain prayers within them and thicker neck pieces are believed to bring more wealth and prosperity to the wearer and their family. These ornaments are said to be bound to the wearer beyond their mortal lives.

Portraits, pg 23 (left to right)

Mistun: Naga man wearing hat with feathers, ear plugs, neck ornament and upper garment, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1877, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Yanuk Kongan: Naga woman carrying a basket strapped to her head and holding a spear with her right hand, wearing traditional garment and neck, ear, and arm ornament, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1876, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Puntun Rankaintintysa: Jaipur Naga man wearing a green head cap and ear, neck and arm ornament with drawings on his face and body, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1876, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Moñsili: Naga woman wearing ear-rings, neck ornament and garment, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1875, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Sarbe Mikir Cooli: Naga man wearing neck ornament, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1877, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Thuh Bishigaon: Naga female wearing head-gear, earrings, neck ornament and garment, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1877, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Risia Themokedima: Naga man sitting with folded arms, wearing ear and neck ornament and lower garment, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1876, watercolor and chalk on paper.

Kesiga Themokelsa: Naga man wearing earrings, neck ornament and garment, from an album of nineteen drawings, 1876, watercolor and chalk on paper.

All images credit: The Trustees of the British Museum

Artifacts, pg 24, 25

1
Earring ornaments made of shell discs threaded with string, a bead and stick of bamboo, 19th - 20th century, Yimchunger Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

2
Neck ornaments and models of carved wooden humans, 19th - 20th century, Konyak Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

3
Metal cuff bracelet, 19th - 20th century, community unknown. Image credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

4
Twisted fiber and glass bead necklace with brass accents, 19th - 20th century, Konyak Naga. Image credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

5
Belt or stomacher made of wood, rattan, brass plates and twisted fiber, 19th century, Konyak Naga. Image credit: The Trustees of the British Museum

6
Necklace of 4 boars' tusks with red dyed cane-work and carnelian conch-shell plate ornamentation, 19th - 20th century, community unknown. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

7
Brass torque necklace with spiral motif, late 19th or early 20th century, community unknown. Image credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

8
Neck ornament of a carved wooden human head with marks on the face indicating tattoos, 19th - 20th century, Konyak Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

9
Bracelet made of shell, stone and glass, early 20th century, Ao Naga. Image credit: The Trustees of the British Museum

10
Models of a Chang warrior with a cane hat and shoulder and loin cloth, 19th - 20th century, Chang Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

11
Carved wooden models of a Sema bridal party in traditional attire, 19th - 20th century, Sema Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

12
Chest ornament of a dark wood carving of a individual wearing bead necklaces and ear ornaments, 19th - 20th century, Konyak Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

13
Woman's bead necklace with conch shell pendant, 19th - 20th century, community unknown. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

14
Conch shell necklace on a glass-paste beaded chain, late 19th or early 20th century, Ao Naga. Image © credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

15
Breast-plate style necklace of agate, glass, brass, shell, bone, fiber, 19th - 20th century, Ao Naga. Image credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

16
Men's necklace made of the tusks of wild boars, wood, plaited red-dyed rattan, and shells decorated with red glass beads, early 20th century, Ao Naga. Image credit: The Trustees of the British Museum

17
Commemorative head ornament of cane and beadwork, with a black bristle sweat fringe, 19th - 20th century, Konyak Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

18
Neck ornament with enameled tin plate and a boar's tusk, attached by string and fastened with blue bead toggle, 19th - 20th century, Chang Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum

19
Man's three-string necklace made of red trade beads, shells imitating tiger's teeth and coiled brass wires, 19th - 20th century, Yimchunger Naga. Image credit: Pitts Rivers Museum



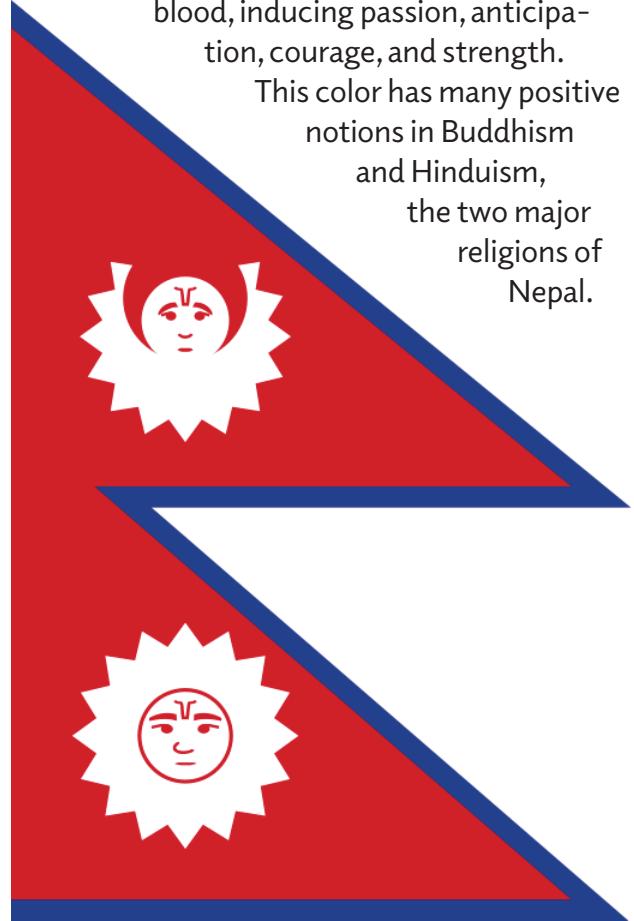
The Non-Quadrilateral National Flag ST

Each of the 194 national flags have specific colors, patterns, and motifs, that reflect the identity, patriotism, and pride of its people. Even so, each of these unique flags conform to the constraints of a rectangular composition. All, with the exception of one defiant nation's flag: Nepal.

The Nepalese flag boasts two triangular pendants: crimson in color with blue borders, containing motifs of the sun and moon, that reflect the landscape, people, and ethos of the nation of Nepal.

Crimson: Represents bravery and blood, inducing passion, anticipation, courage, and strength.

This color has many positive notions in Buddhism and Hinduism, the two major religions of Nepal.



Flag of Nepal prior to 1962, when the flag's emblems were changed along with the formation of a new constitutional government. Image Credit: Public Domain

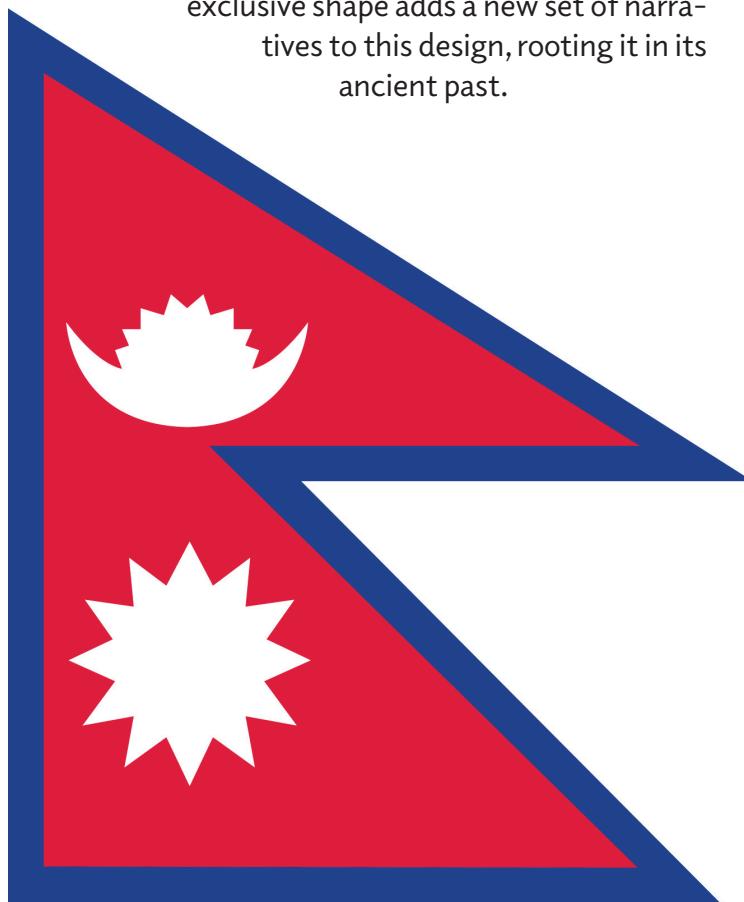
The shade of red is drawn from the color of the national flower: *Laali Guras (Rhododendron)*.

Blue: Symbolizes the peace and calmness of its people. The borders on the flag of this Himalayan nation simultaneously reflect both the boundaries of Nepal on land and its limitless expansion into the depths of the skies.

White: Universally represents peace, purity, simplicity, and neutrality.

The Sun and Moon unite to represent the immortality of the nation, for it shall thrive for as long as the sun (सूर्य) and Moon (चन्द्र) exist in the sky. Individually, the Sun on the lower pendant represents the hot climate of the Terai region in southern Nepal, while the upper Moon represents the serenity and the cold of the high-altitudes of the Himalayas in the north.

This specific composition of elements synthesizes a distinctive Nepalese identity; however, the exclusive shape adds a new set of narratives to this design, rooting it in its ancient past.



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Image Credit: Nepal Sanctuary Treks



It is commonly believed that the triangular forms symbolize the Himalayas and that the two pendants are representative of either the two leading religions, or the two ancient ruling clans: the Ranas and the Shahs.

The Nepalese flag retains the bygone customs of South Asian fashion as it was common for the region, once known collectively as *Bharat Varsha*, to use triangular flags. While the modern nations constituting this ancient region capitulated to a more globally accepted, western approach—the rectangle—Nepal stays true to its history and upholds its prized vestige of antiquity.

The design for the Nepalese flag is so long-lived that its origins are forgotten. Many believe that it was gifted to the people of Nepal by Vishnu, a predominant god in Hinduism, while others presume that it was created by the earliest rulers of ancient Nepal.

The ancient flag underwent changes over the course of its history: the most significant being the addition of the blue borders, and the simplification of the solar-lunar motifs. Both emblems previously had facial features and more rays; however, in 1962, they were simplified with the removal of the faces and rays. This modern and simple adaptation was officiated on December 16, 1962.

Woven together are symbols of the earth and celestia, of courage and peace, mortality and divinity, state and faith; producing a banner of remarkable design. The flag of this rather overlooked nation is a divine symbol of its cultures, landscapes, and peoples.

It waves on the peaks of the Himalayas today as a testament to the lost flags of the South Asian subcontinent, carrying forth an ancient history into a modern world.

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Image Credit: Ragendra Thapa

“*Rato Ra Ragat*,” a patriotic song by Gopal Prashad Rima, commonly used as an anthem in the military, beautifully glorifies the flag as a symbol of Nepal.

रातो र चन्द्र सूर्य जंगी नशिअन हाम्रो ज्यूँदो रगत सरयो बल्दो यो शान हाम्रो

Rato ra chandra surya jangi nishan hamro,jiudo ragat sari yo baldo yo shaan hamro

हमिल झै अटल यो झुकेन यो कहलियै लत्रेन यो कहलि जङ्गी नशिअन हाम्रो

Himal jhai atal yo,jhukena yo kahile latrena yo kahile,jangi nishan hamro

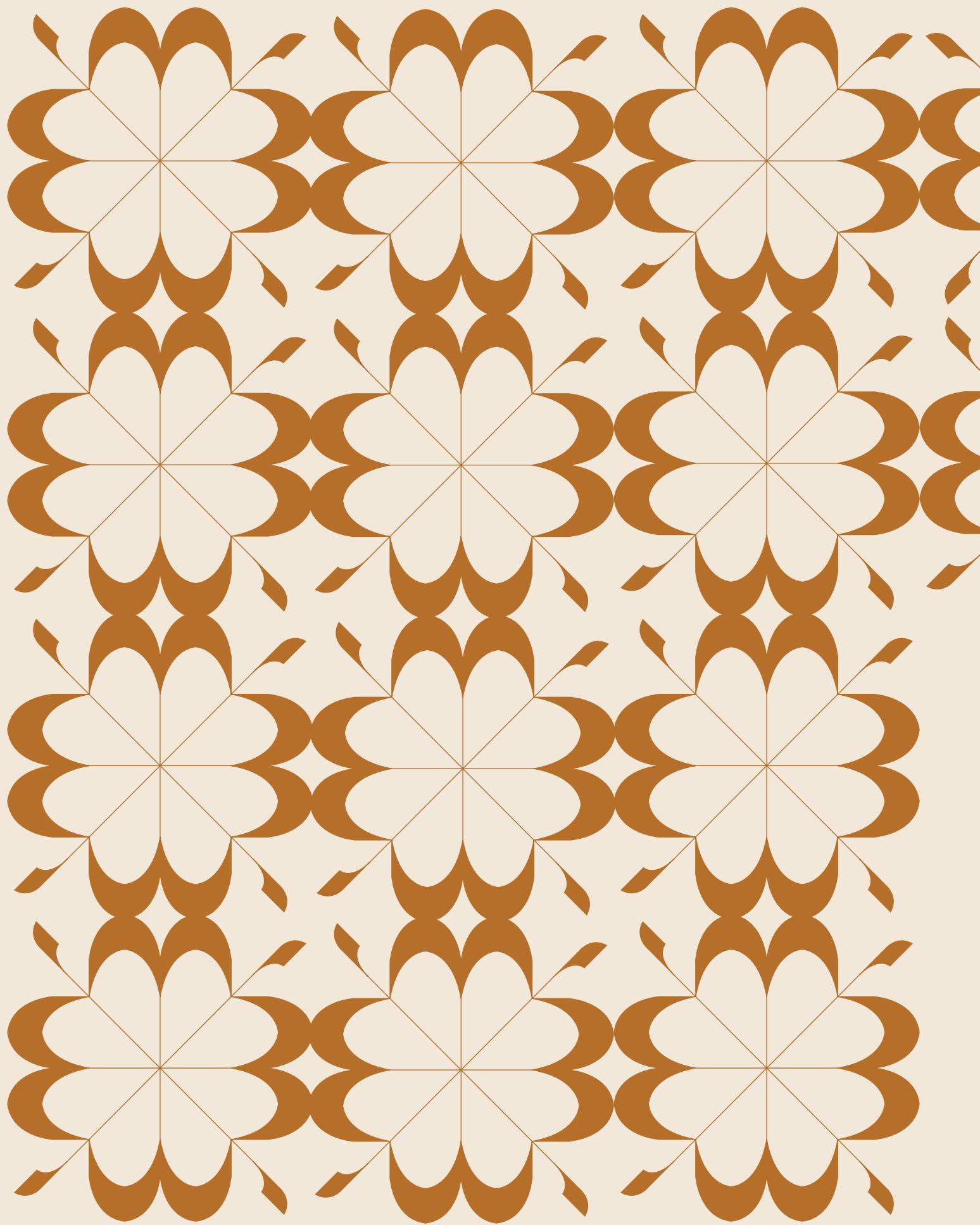
जबसम्म चन्द्र सूर्य आकाशमा रहन्छन् तबसम्म हुन्छ आफ्नै रातो रगत हाम्रो

Jaba samma chandra surya aakashma rahancha,taba samma huncha aafnai,rato ragat yo hamro

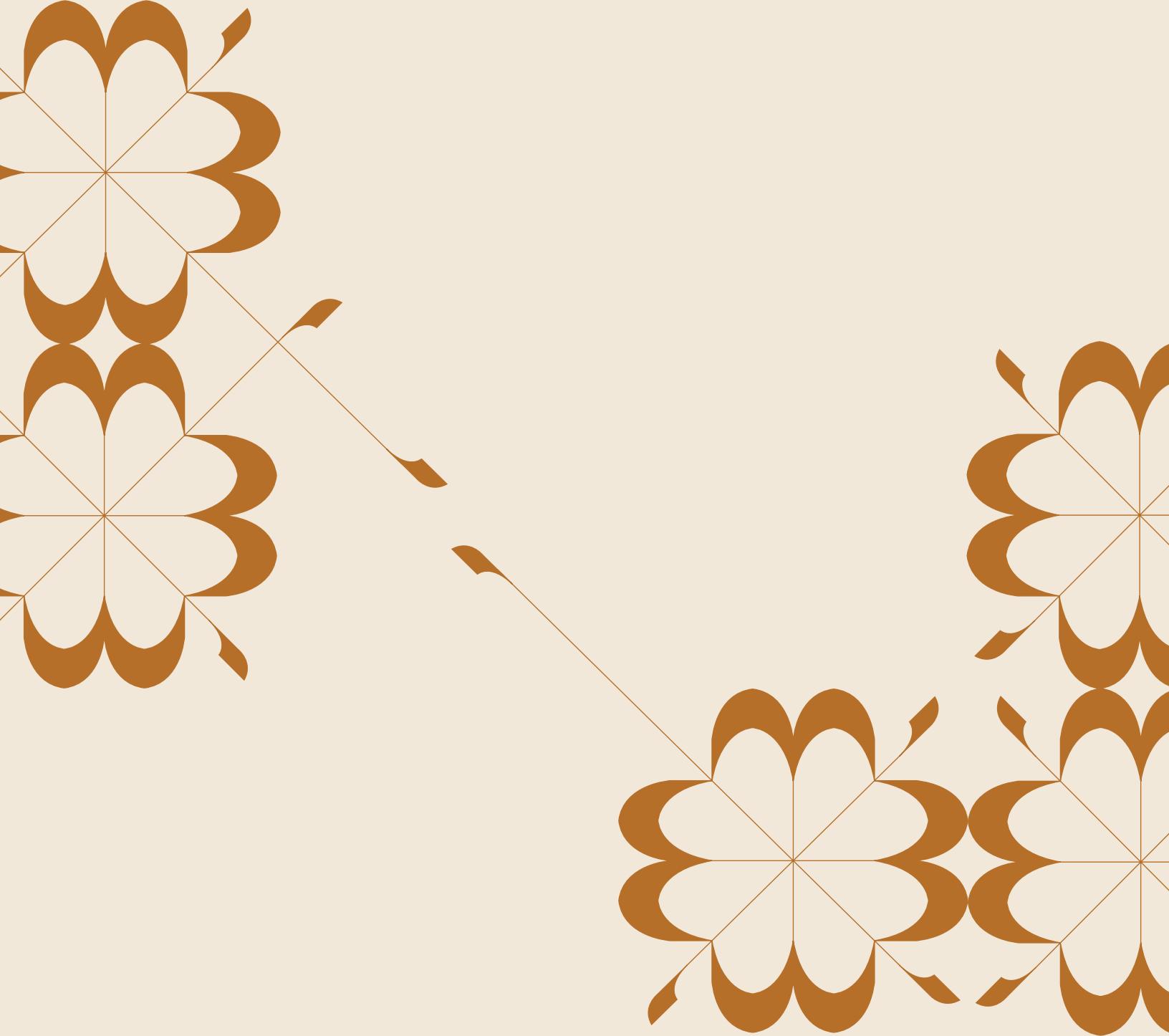
*Our flag, red and adorned with the sun and moon, is our esteemed symbol.
It is equivalent to our running blood and upholds our dignity.*

*Solid like the Himalayas, neither bowing nor fallen to ground, is it our
esteemed symbol.*

*As long as the sun and moon adorn the sky, this symbol will be ours.
It is the red blood within us.*



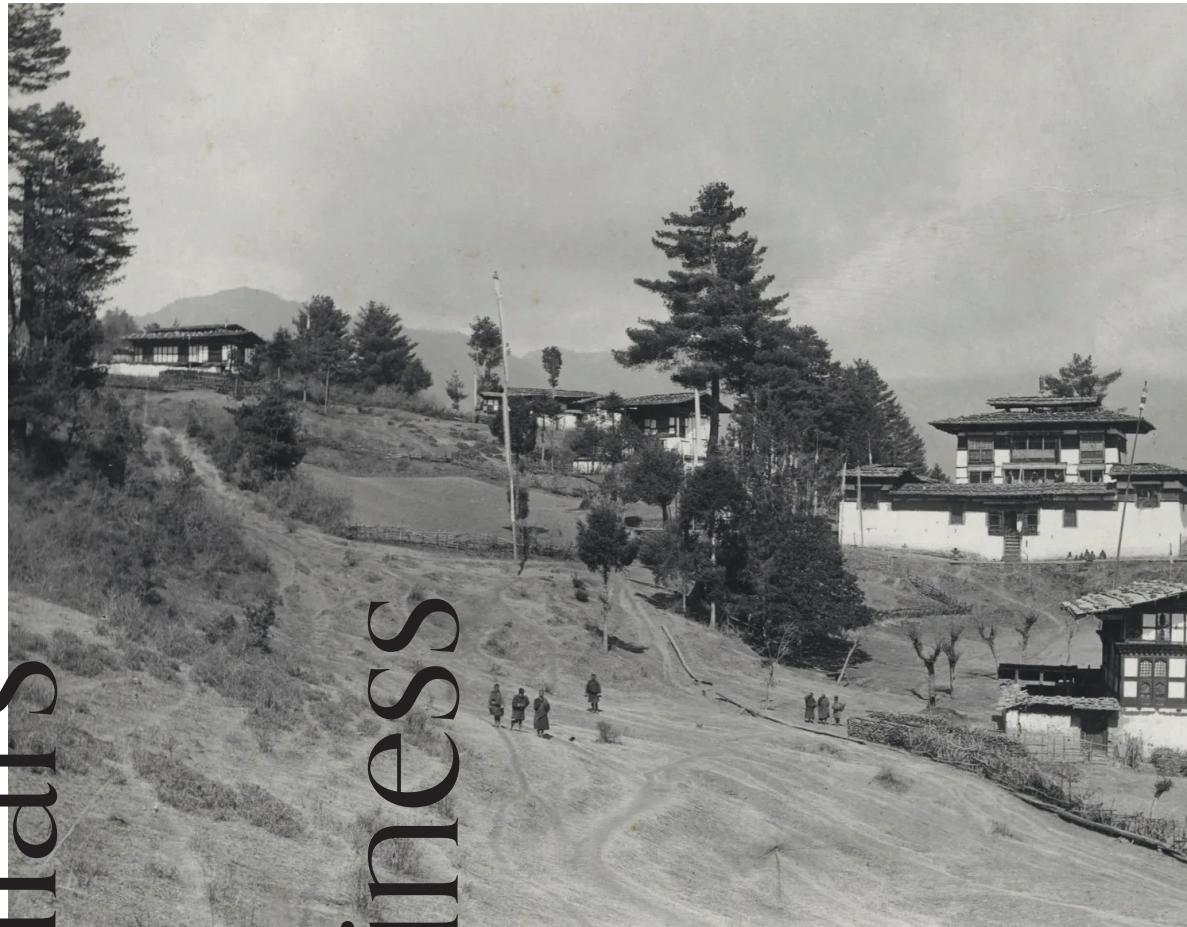
Spaces and Places



Bhutan's Pillars of Happiness

YVA

*Gorina Monastery situated in
the Paro valley, 1970.
Image Credit: Bonhams/BNPS*



The kingdom of Bhutan is enshrined in the Western imagination as one of the happiest countries in the world. Many attribute this to Bhutan's unique approach to national development. With little regard for economic metrics, Bhutan chooses to focus instead on overall wellbeing as measured by the Gross National Happiness Index—an alternative paradigm that considers sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, environmental conservation, preservation and promotion of culture, and good governance.

However, Gross National Happiness is not simply another economic abstraction. It is a reflection of the spiritual modalities that are steeped in Bhutan's landscape, and the holistic approach to compassion that permeates all aspects of art, culture, and life in Bhutan. Such compassion is intricately tied to its Buddhist practices and philosophy—eloquently summarized into the ‘four pillars of happiness’ by Rinpoche: The Fifth Reincarnate and head of the Sangchen Ogyen Tsuklag Monastery in Bhutan.



The *brahmavihāras* ('immeasurable' or 'divine abode'), commonly referred to as the 'Four Pillars of Happiness,' are integral tenets from Buddhist teachings. In the context of daily life, they teach one how to react less frequently to external disturbances—whether they cause happiness or sorrow—and maintain an inner stillness, which is seen as the ultimate secret to leading a happy life.

Omnipresent reminders of these pillars of happiness are carved into various aspects of life in Bhutan. Art is an essential part of the kingdom's cultural identity, and it retains the purity of handcrafting techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation. As seen in the *thangka* paintings—of divine beings, *mandalas*, and more—the relationship between an individual and their craft is the constant reminder of the four pillars of happiness, namely: *jampā* (loving kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (joy for another's success), and *upekkhā* (non-attachment). These four tenets of life remind one to cease their search for happiness in experiences outside of themselves, and to rather find joy in the everyday workings of life.

Jampā, or loving kindness, is the first *brahmavihāra* in Buddhist thought. Known as *maitrī* in Sanskrit, and *mettā* in Pali, *jampā* is the wish that all sentient beings be happy. *Jampā* counters malice and ill-will; it wishes that all sentient beings enjoy good health, company, wealth, intelligence, success, and peace. The Bhutanese normally cultivate loving kindness by chanting a prayer:

May all mother sentient beings,

॥ མ'ན'པ'མ'ག'ན'ད'ན'པ'ན'॥

as vast as space,

॥ ། ས'ད'ସ'ମ'ଶ'ତ'ନ'ସ'ମ'ଶ' ॥

attain happiness,

॥ ད'ନ'ସ'ଦ'ସ'ନ'ନ'ସ'ଦ'ସ'ଦ'ସ' ॥

and the causes of happiness.

॥ ན'ନ'ଲ'କ'ସ'ତ'ଶ'ୟ'ତ'ଶ' ॥

A Thangka Painting representing the Kalāchakrā Mandalā, mid 15th century, Central Tibet, Ngor Monastery, paint on fabric.
Image and Text Credit: Sotheby's

The Kalāchakrā tantrā was devised in the 11th or 12th century by the scholar, Abhayakaragupta, at the Vikramashila monastery, and is one of the most intricate and aesthetically appealing of all mandala painting in Vajrayana Buddhism. It depicts the six-hundred and thirty-four deity mandala of Kalāchakrā within a circle depicting the charnel grounds.





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Sculpture of Buddha attended by Bodhisattvas
Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya, second half of the 8th
century, Sumatra or southern Thailand, copper alloy.
Image Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art

“Always remember that the most important thing is to live life in the present moment and that happiness is not a by-product of external factors, but the result of positively conditioning your mind. Happiness is at the grasp of everyone.”

— Rinpoche



Avalokitesvara, known as Chenrezig in Bhutan, symbolizes the compassion of all Buddhas. He commonly takes the form of a 1000 armed, 1000 eyed, and 11 headed figure to aid everyone in their journey to salvation.

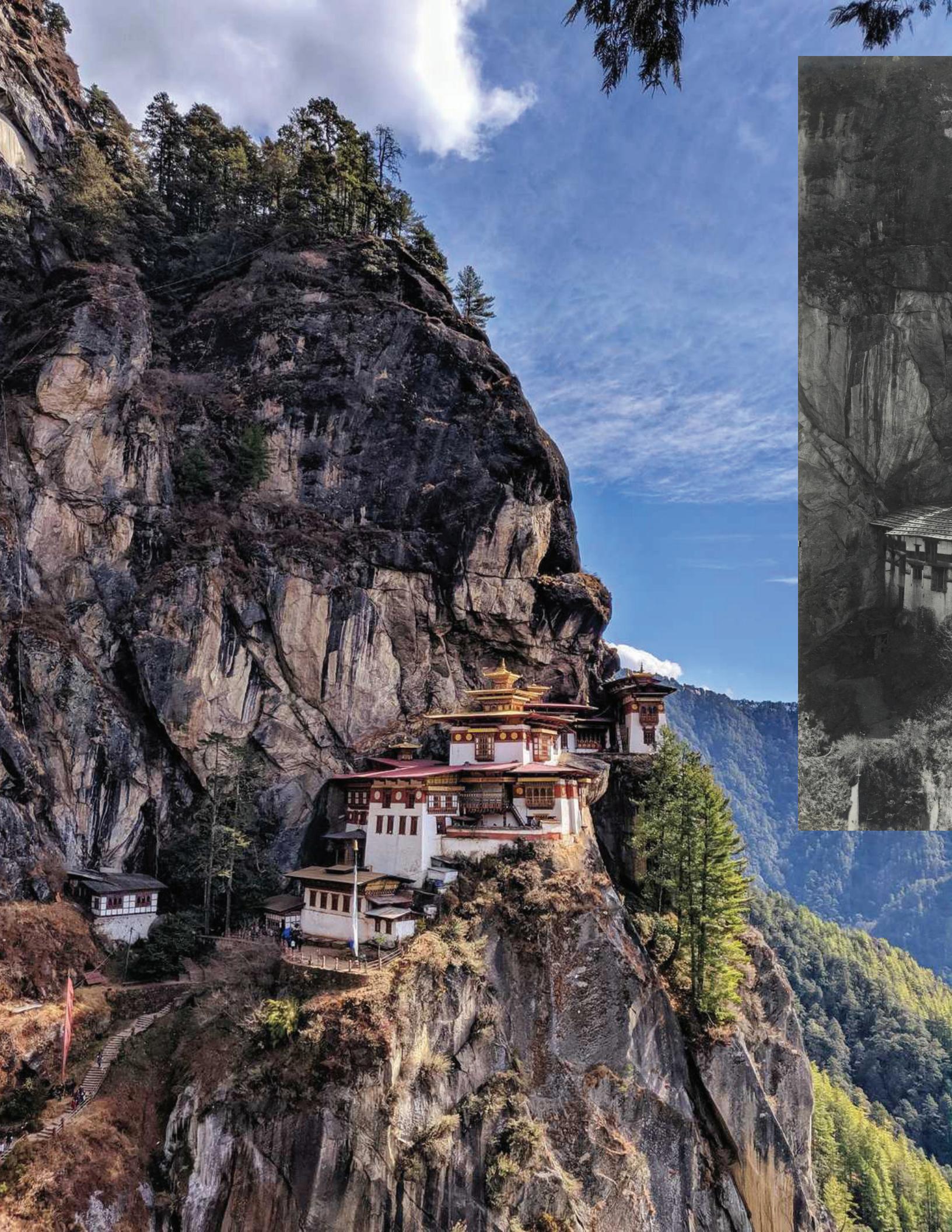


A hermit's house sitting on a cliff.
Image Credit: Bonhams/BNPS

Jampā leads to *karuṇā*, or compassion—the second *brahmavihāra*. Along with the other *brahmavihāras*, *jampā* and *karuṇā* are represented in the *Kalāchakrā Mandalā*: the eternal *mandala* of life. Compassion is the empathy that manifests in each being, tied to the concept of *aniccā*: non-attachment or impermanence.

Impermanence is the Buddhist concept that is at the root of Bhutanese culture. With any misfortune, there is a remembrance of the impermanence of each situation—such that change is seen as a beacon of future hope for a larger good. This also works in the converse manner, with a commitment towards maintaining non-attachment towards success, wealth, and fortune. The third *brahmavihāra* is *muditā*, empathetic joy for the success of others, and the fourth *brahmavihāra* is *upekkhā*, that is equanimity. Together, they encapsulate the multidimensional aspects of being.

Such a spiritual approach to happiness confers the ability to reconcile the past and present upon Bhutan's people. They are able to embrace progressive values while remaining rooted in their traditions and spiritual beliefs. Their culture and religion is not prescriptive, but rather focuses on enabling each individual to follow the middle path in everyday living. Bhutan is a living paragon of the philosophies of happiness, mindfulness, and holistic wellness that have enraptured the world through recent interest in mindfulness and meditation practices.





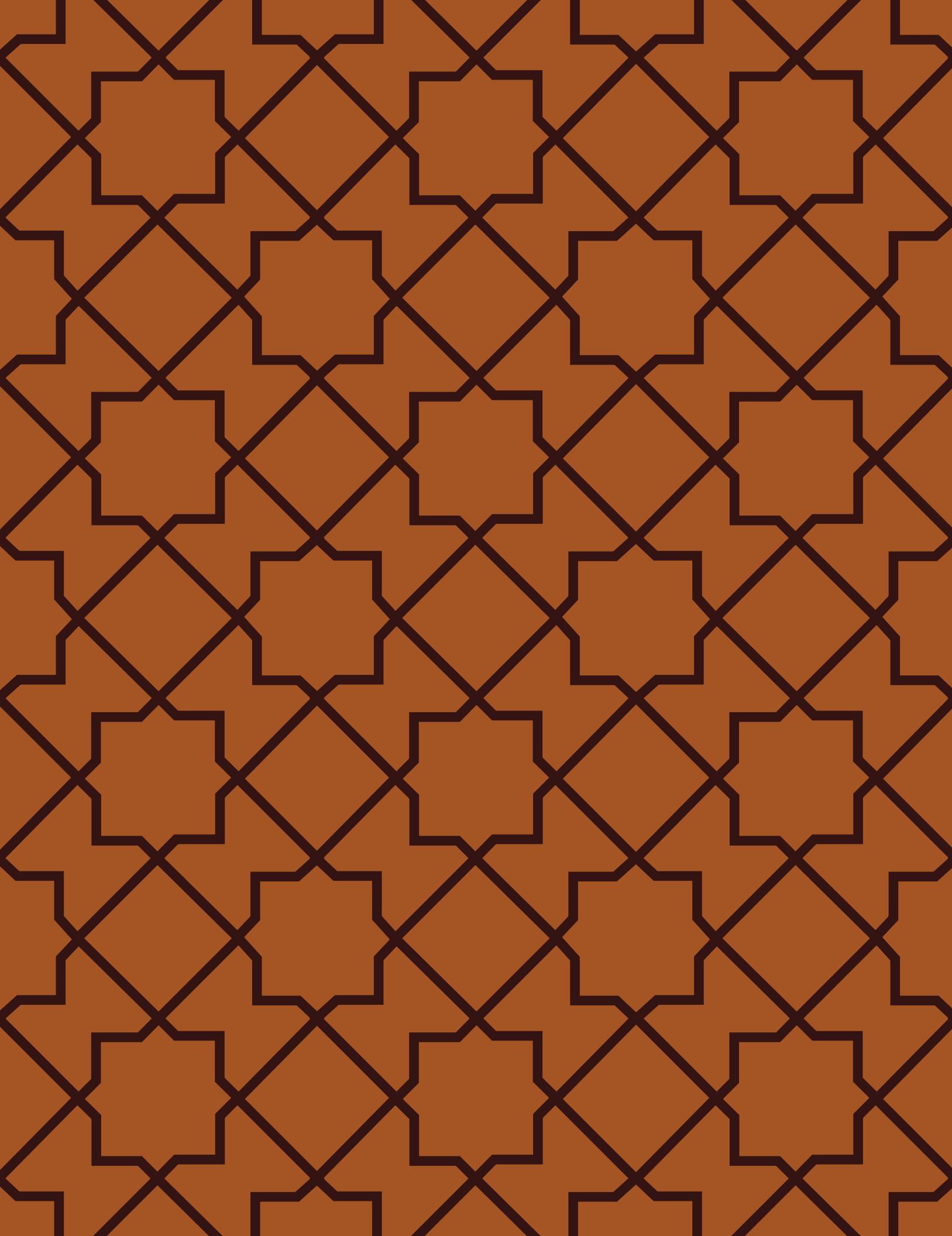
Above
The ancient Tiger's Nest
Monastery sitting on a steep
mountain side, thousands of
feet above sea level, 1970.
Image Credit: Bonhams/BNPS

Left
The Tiger's Nest Monastery,
21st century. Image Credit:
Getty Images

"In the Buddhist arts, there is a common thread that runs through each discipline: compassionate aspiration for the enlightenment of sentient beings. Whether it is an artist who is a Buddha emanation, a sacred ringsel from the cremated body of a high lama, or a thangka painting of an enlightened being, the Buddhist principle of liberation for all is the prominent theme.

The art both represents and embodies Buddha nature. These embodiments offer all beings a chance to recognise their own inner Buddha. These arts help point the way toward the true essence and process of revealing this Buddha nature—the real blessing of Buddhist art."

— Venerable Lopon Pemela



The Chaukhandi Tombs *ST*

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Situated in the deserts of southern Pakistan, are the Chaukhandi Tombs, an early Islamic cemetery famed for its bas-relief sculpture work. The sand-stone necropolis stands tall, ever-so-gently caressed by the sun, casting its divine shadow, as an ode to history and the archaic cultures of South Asia. A mere eighteen miles from Karachi, the capital of the Sindh province, is an unshirkable landmark of great artistic significance: the architectural epitome of the cross-cultural confluence that occurred in Pakistan under the Mughal Rule. This compact, two square mile cemetery visually connects the distant corners of the South Asian subcontinent, and is without doubt a beauty to be visited.

The desert lands in which the necropolis lays were once home to the people of the *Jokhio* tribe. This clan is one among the many ethnic groups that populated Sindh; however, they are notable for their unique traditions and craftsmanship. The *Jokhio* people practiced an elaborate burial site construction process. Members of the *Jokhio* tribe believed in having divine resemblance in the space of burial. Their tombs were grand, ornamental, and regal despite having no royal associations. Due to their proximity to cities like Karachi and Thatta—the medieval capital of Sindh—the people of this area were highly influenced by the multicultural amalgamation brought forth by the major trade in the region. Mughal rulers were patrons of the diverse arts and cultures of the Indian subcontinent and promoted its melding, thereby allowing new multicultural traditions to be born. The specific influences that blossomed in Sindh led the *Jokhio* people to design tombs that were aesthetically and culturally very distinctive for its time and place.



Tomb at Chaukandi.
Image Credit: ChanPics



The Chaukhandi tombs were primarily constructed for the deceased of the *Jokhio*, but later were constructed for the *Baloch* people as well. Built over the course of three centuries, the 15th CE - 18 CE, the architecture shows evolution in style. Made of sandstone, the site is composed of many individual tombs, mausoleums, and pavilions; making it a complex expanse of many architectural elements. Despite being under Mughal rule at this time, the tombs at Chaukhandi are recognizably different from Mughal architecture, particularly in their layout, as they predominantly follow a north-south orientation for laying the sarcophaguses. This tradition was foreign to the Sindh province at that time and while it remains unclear as to why this specific orientation was chosen; it can be accredited to the heavy exchange of cultures that took place in the vicinity.

The term ‘chaukhandi’ encompasses a paradigm much larger than what is contained in the site itself.

Sindh Monument at Chaukandi.
Image Credit: Yasir Dora



Chaukandi is the highly detailed architectural style of the Sindh province. Despite the regions predominant Mughal aesthetic; the architecture of this necropolis draws upon multiple cultural sources. The distinctive formation of the tombs, ziggurat like in composition, are unlike most burial sites built in South Asia between the 15th and 18th centuries. Into the bargain of this uniqueness, the architecture is adorned with the most intricate and eye-capturing motifs, which by no means can be accredited to an influence of one sort. Specific vernacular motifs from Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat are mimicked and modified on the surfaces of the sarcophagi and pavilions. Inspiration from South India is seen in architectural components, such as the pillars of larger mausoleums, which are reminiscent of Dravidian architecture. This combination of styles, that creates a new, emergent aesthetic, is known as 'chaukhandi.'



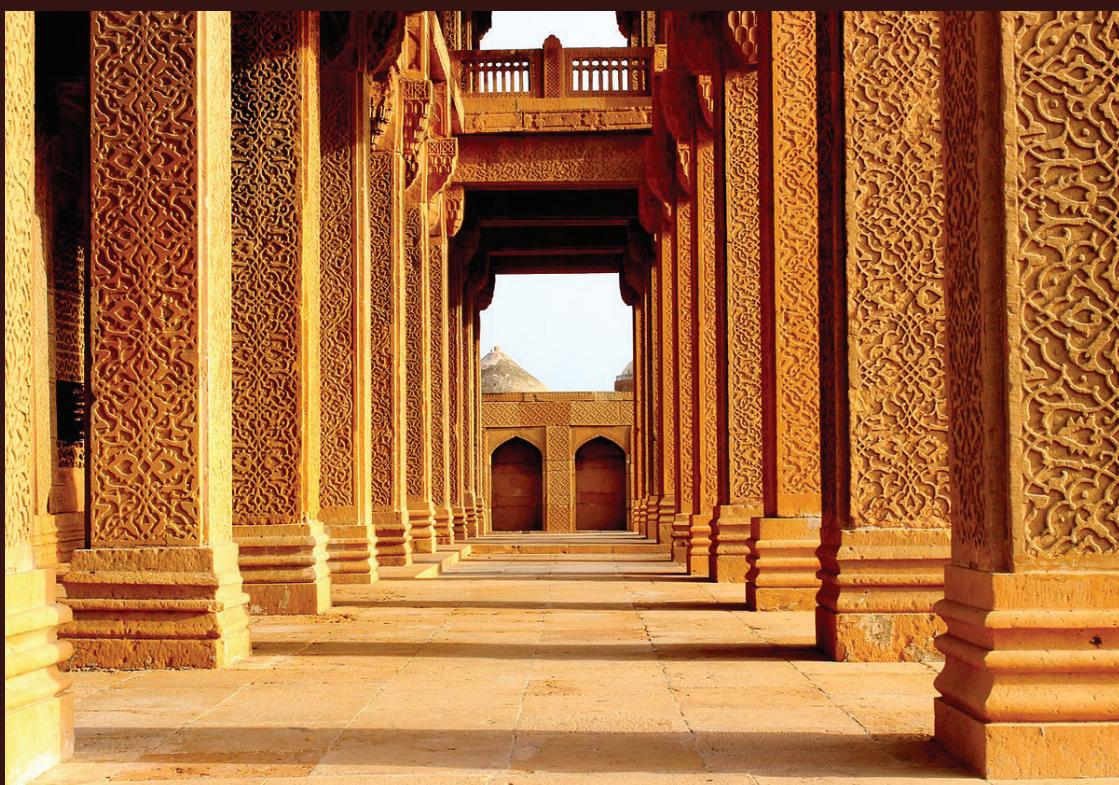
Each tomb has a distinct identity. Sarcophagi of certain male members are crowned with turbans and are adorned with battle motifs such as horsemen, swords, shields, bows, and arrows. On the contrary, tombs of female members were decorated with jewelry such as necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and rings. The intricate details of these reliefs are in impeccable condition due to the arid climate of the area. These motifs are still used as references for pattern designs in textiles, ceramics, jewelry, and architecture in modern day Pakistan.

The chaukhandi style spread across the Sindh region and is recognizable in Makli, a much larger Necropolis that is considered to be ‘Little Mecca.’ The visual language shared by these burial sites is so exquisite that they make one wonder whether their construction was blessed with divine intervention. Revisiting the history of sites such as Chaukhandi brings to our attention the interbreeding of such diverse visual cultures and the creation of new ones, which in turn forms a legacy of ever-evolving art forms.

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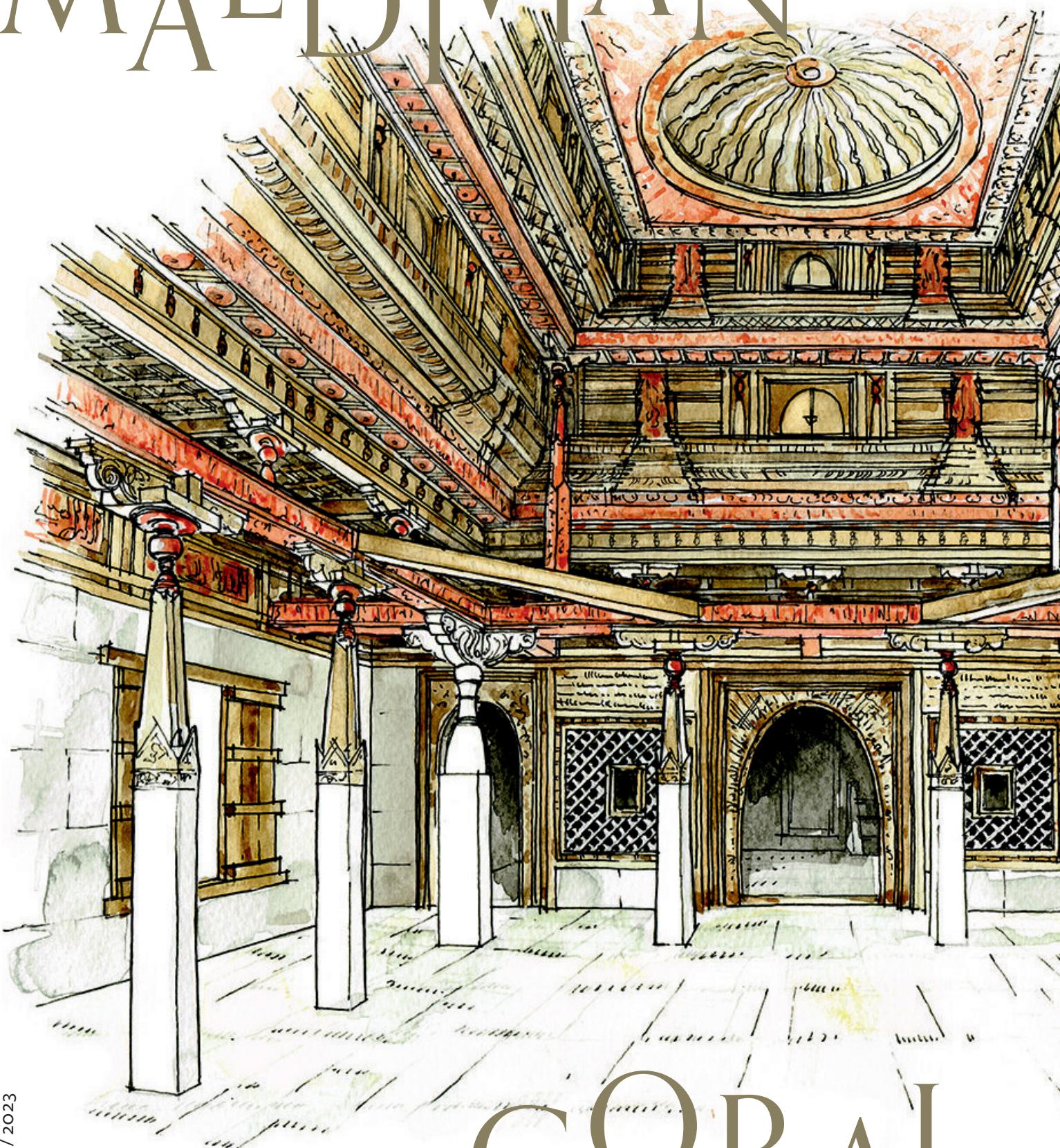
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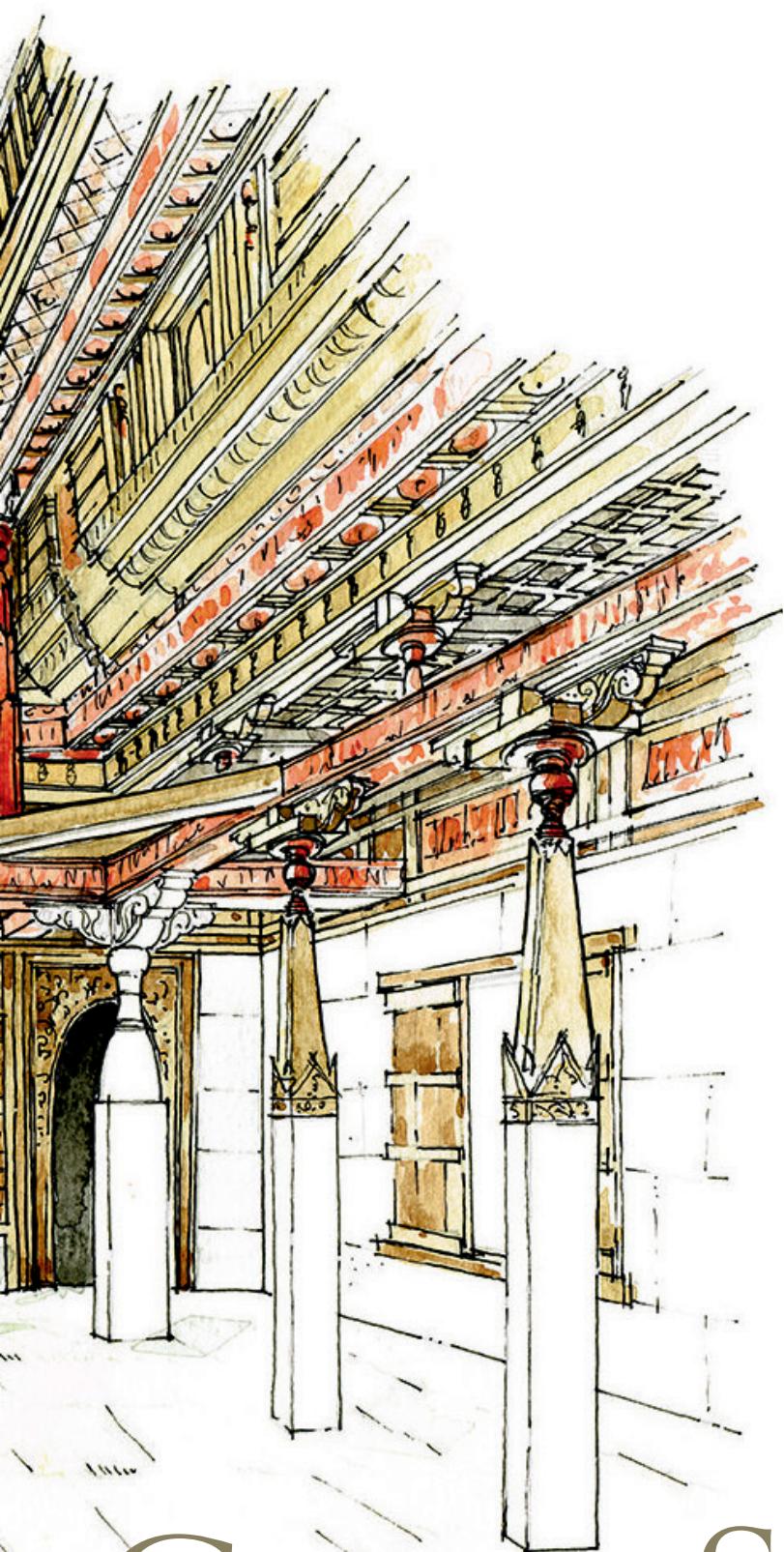


*Pillars at Malki, Thatta.
Image Credit: Aliraza Manjothi*

MALDIVIAN



CORAL



COVES

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The Republic of Maldives is a lattice of tropical islands in the Indian ocean both geographically and culturally removed from the rest of South Asia. The intramural practices of this country and their connections to its distinctive landscape are visible in even the structural foundations of this civilization: its architectural spaces.

The Maldivians' relationship with the sea is a profound one. Home to some of the most precious coral reefs in the world, they have a special relationship with the coral stones that served as the building blocks of entire Maldivian cities.

Architectural Drawing from 'Coral Stone Mosques of Maldives: The Vanishing Legacy Of The Indian Ocean' by Mauroof Jameel and Yahaya Ahmed. Image Credit: Mauroof Jameel and Yahaya Ahmed



Coral rock was once used as the principal material for architectural construction in the Maldives. Primarily used for buildings and roads, the material was vital to its economy and society. Ancient architectural sites, such as the initial mosques, indicate the importance of coral in construction and decoration. In the flat and sandy landscapes, coral was the only construction material available to the country. The stones were taken from coastline reefs at a shallow depth of around three to six feet, with an extraction process that involved breaking apart live coral in order to reach the more sturdy stone.

Apart from stone construction, coral was majorly used in the production of lime. Lime plays an important role in construction as it serves as a stabilization element, needed in the construction of both roads and buildings. It was more affordable to produce lime locally with coral, rather than buying imported cement. Coral was burned at high temperatures to produce a variety of lime that was suitable for coral stone construction. Lime proved essential to this architectural style as it allowed for more complex and long-lasting constructions to be made while sustainably using local materials.

*Exterior details of the mosque at Fareedhee Magu, Malé, Maldives.
Image Credit: Hukuru Miskiy*

spaces and places



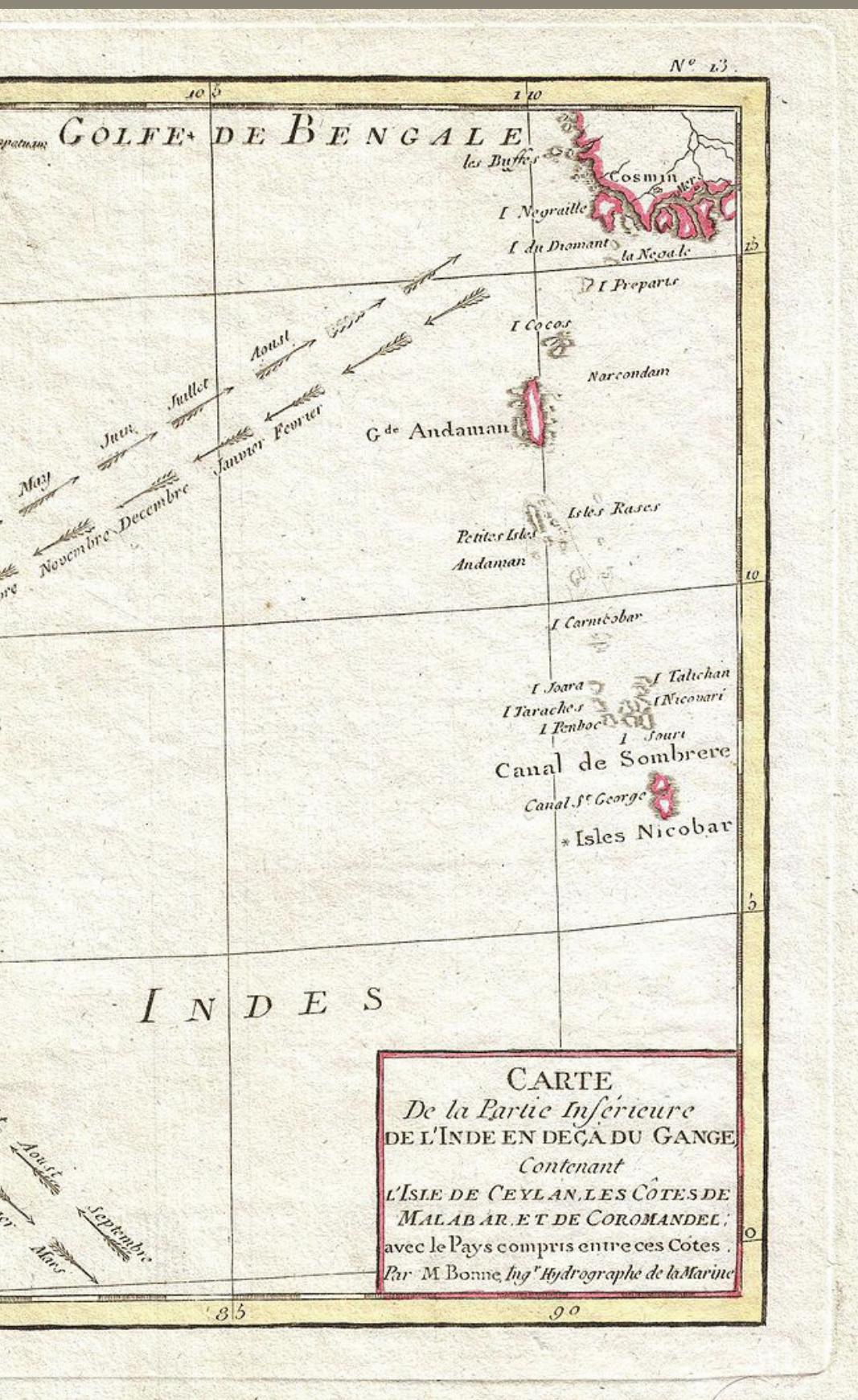
Porite corals were the most common in this practice. The process entailed retrieving live porite corals from the seabed; cutting them into blocks while they were still soft; drying them; and then commencing the construction. This architectural process has been practiced since the Maldivian Buddhist era, yet it was raised to an fine art form after the 12th century with the introduction of Islam. Early Islamic coral architecture consists of detailed vegetative friezes—an evolution from the purely structural practices that existed before.

The majority of historic areas in the Maldives depended on tropical woods for construction because coral architecture was reserved for socially significant constructions, such as tombs and mosques. Only the wealthy could afford stone homes made using corals; therefore, this art form was a symbol of wealth and honor. However, as the nation grew wealthy with the expansion of the fishing industry in the 1970s, more citizens invested their money in home constructions as a means of reflecting their new-found luxurious lifestyles.

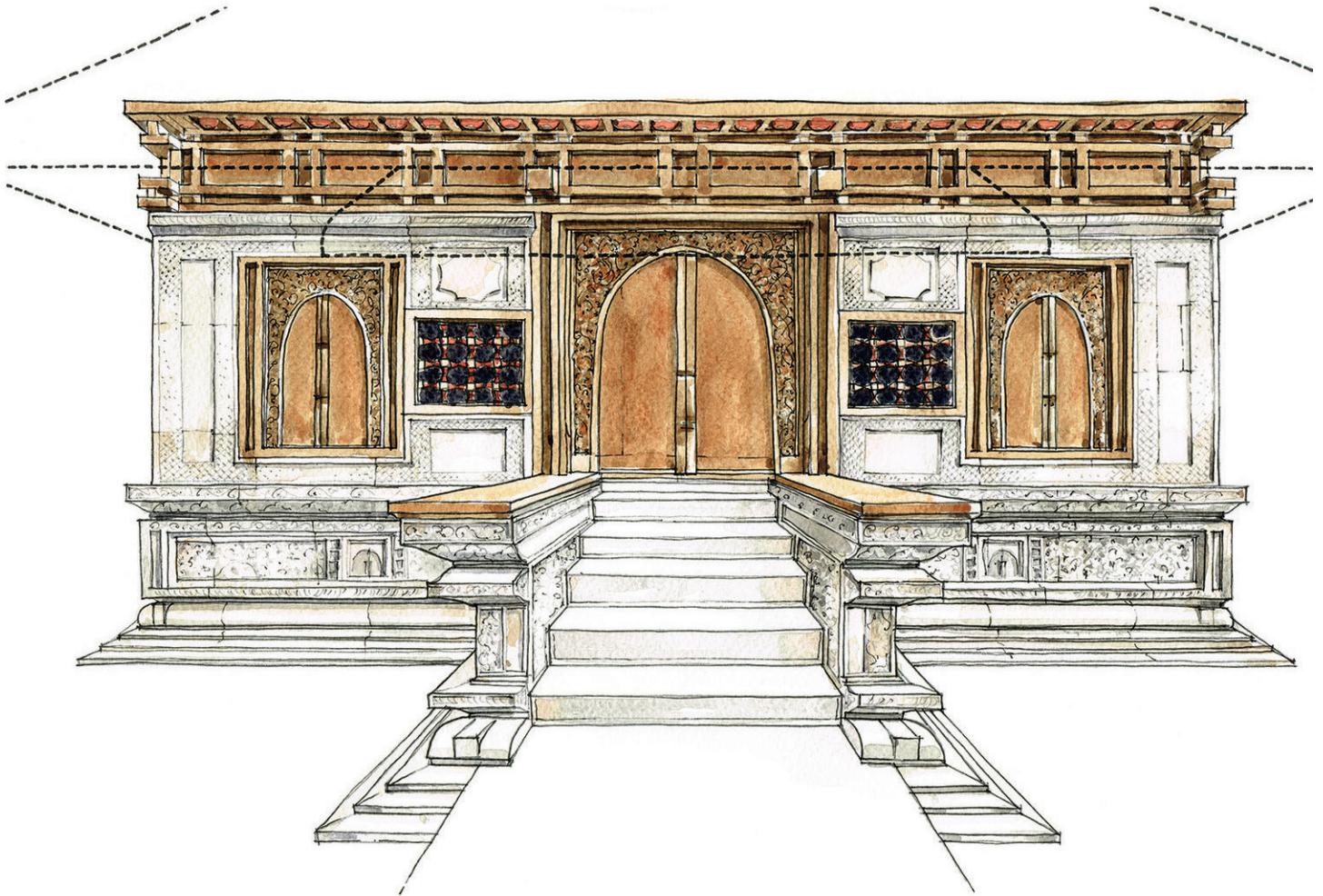
Carte de l'Inde et des îles de l'Océan Indien

Sur la Longitude du Méridien de l'île de Fer. 90°





Map of the Southern part of India, Island of Ceylon (currently Sri Lanka), and Maldives, 1780, Rigobert Bonne, published as Plate No. L3 in Bonne's 1780 Atlas de Toutes les Parties Connues du Globe Terrestre. Image Credit: Public Domain



As this practice expanded and more coral was extracted, there was an inevitable decline in healthy coral reefs. Understanding the global and biological importance of coral reefs, the Maldivian government grew concerned about the environmental implications of coral mining. Even so, it was only as recently as 1992 that the government introduced laws to protect the rich submarine landscapes. Today, coral constructions are completely banned; however, this archaic tradition lives on in the formerly built monuments that still stand on the islands of the Maldives.

Now, there is global understanding of the importance of coral reefs in maintaining a healthy marine ecosystem, and this distinctive architectural style is grounded in the gifts and limitations of nature. It is a mere glimpse into the marvels that exist within the island nation: the Maldivian landscape is strewn with an intrinsic beauty beyond what meets the eye. The architecture itself, is a testament to the relationship that the people of Maldives have had with their land and ecological environment for centuries.

Paradesi YVA Synagogue

Also: [Cochin Jewish Synagogue](#)
[Mattancherry Synagogue](#)



Echoing ideas of love, nature's beauty, and longevity, these hand-painted tiles celebrate the *Paradesi Synagogue* as a space for prayer, community, and human connection.

Map of Fort Cochin from 'The True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East—India Coast of Malabar and Choromandel as also of the Island of Ceylon' by Philip Baldeaus, 1744, opaque watercolor on paper. Image Credit: Bartele Gallery



The *Paradesi Synagogue*, built in 1568, is the oldest synagogue in the Commonwealth of Nations.

With its mid-18th century hand-painted tiled flooring from China, a magnanimous clock tower, Belgian chandeliers, stone slabs with Hebrew inscriptions, an oriental rug gifted by the emperor of Ethiopia, and great scrolls of the Old Testament, the site is a multicultural architectural marvel, and one of the most historically relevant locations in Fort Kochi.

The area surrounding the synagogue, colloquially known as 'Jew Town,' has historically been the center of the spice trade. Peppered with curio shops, the neighborhood and synagogue are an eclectic collage of global craftsmanship and a distinctly local aesthetic.

The synagogue adopted the name ‘*paradesi*’ because it was built by the Sephardic Jewish immigrants. The members of the synagogue formed a community of ‘*Paradesi* Jews’. The word itself—‘*paradesi*,’ has connotations of dis-belonging and exclusion. However, the *Paradesi* community was the antithesis of that sentiment.

It was a space of global exchange and solidarity; with the synagogue providing that inclusive space for Jewish immigrants, of Sephardi and Ashkenazi heritage, from Britain, Spain, Portugal, Syria, Iraq, and many other countries. Today, the synagogue caters to the *Paradesi* Jews who remained in the Malabar region. They refer to themselves as the Cochin Jews, or more broadly, the Malabari Jews.

The typical chinoiserie scene of the rural landscape (1) speaks to the relationship between humans and nature—a cohesive integration that is underlies all creation, leading to spiritual oneness. Myopic frames of a tree peonies on a boulder (2) represent the queen of flowers—a sign of good fortune. Bursts of lotus and prunus flowers (3) symbolize unending love, and the beauty in the contrast between winter and summer. Lastly, chrysanthemum flowers and willows emerge from a boulder (4) signifying the fidelity that arises after the transitory states of autumn and spring.

The tiles together weave a story of the inherent connection between humans and nature that allow one to foster solidarity and spiritual awakening.



Portuguese illustration from the *Códice Casanatense*, depicting the Jewish people of the Malabar Coast in India, circa 1540, opaque watercolor on paper.
Image Credit: Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome

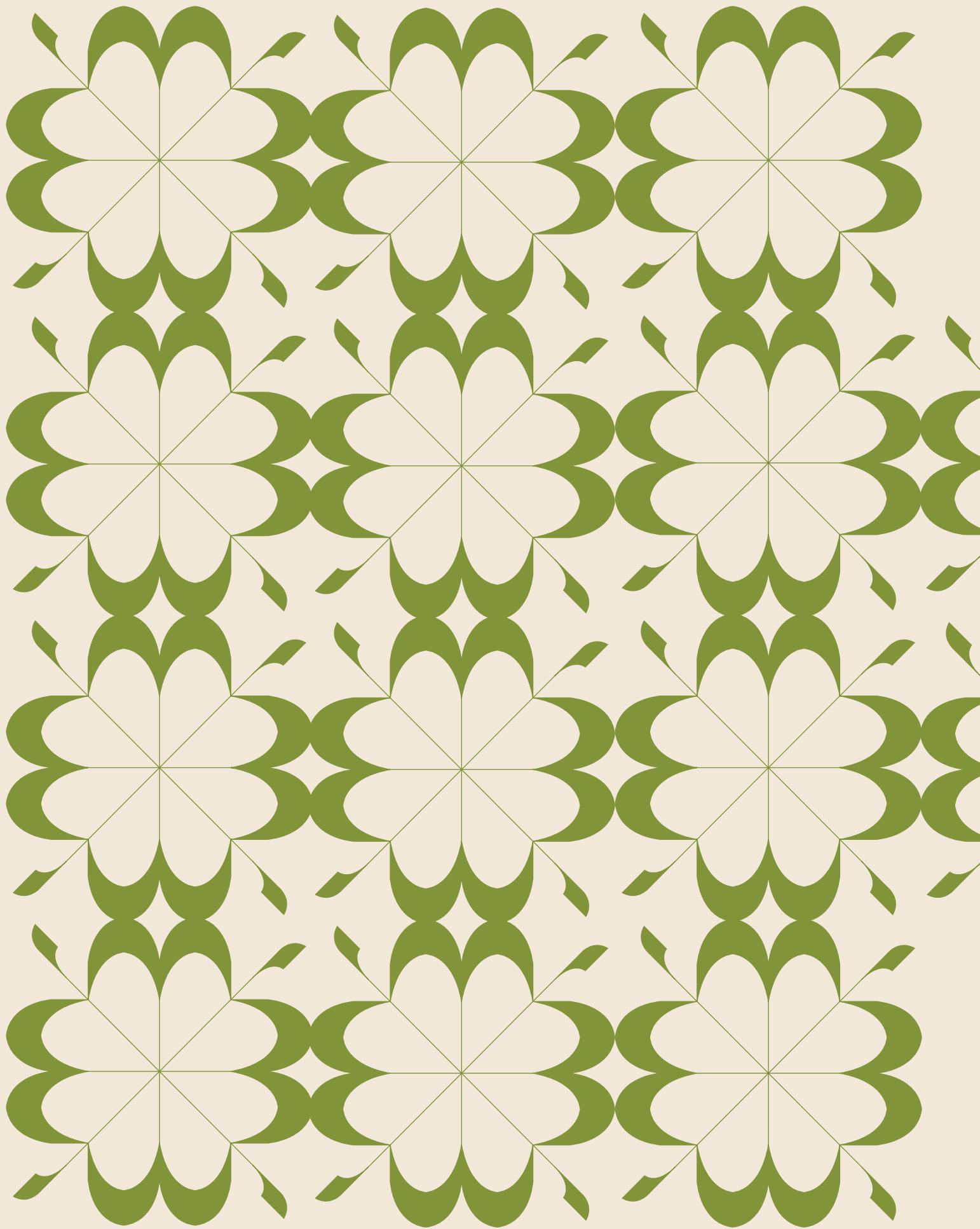
The 1100 tiles in the synagogue, comprise four basic patterns. The imagery is reflective of a love story that is narrated in the Chinese poem—

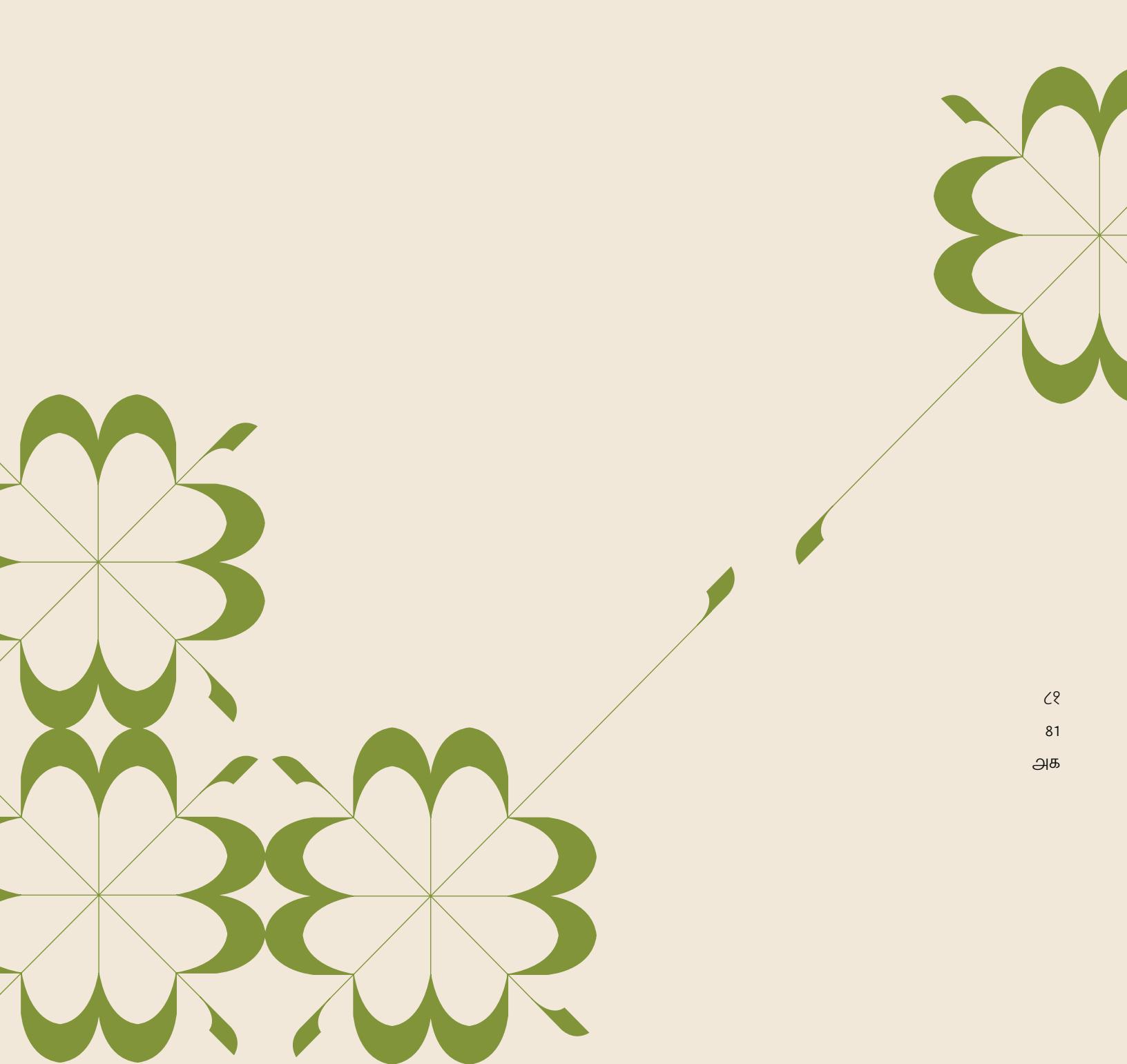
*Two pigeons, lover's flying high,
A Chinese vessel was sailing by,
Weeping willow hanging o'er,
Bridge with lover's, father sore
Koong-Shee and Chang did fly,
To a small house not close by,
Happy lovers, ne'er a frown,
Little house was burn't to ground.
Ne'er no more were lover's seen,
Weeping willows, sorrow, trees,
Empassioned love birds in the sky
Their love, true love, ne'er will die.*

The word ‘paradesi’ means ‘not desi,’ or ‘foreigner’ in many South Asian languages.



Tiles from the Paradesi Synagogue in Fort Kochi, Kerala. Image Credit: Yukti Agarwal



A large, stylized green floral illustration occupies the top half of the page. It features several large, five-petaled flowers with dark green outlines and centers. Green leaves and stems are scattered throughout, some reaching across the frame.

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Transcontinental Conversations



Fast Fashion – *Not So Fashionable* YVA

Power, Vulnerability, and Racial Capitalism in South Asia

Have you ever wondered where your clothes come from? Whether it is an *H&M* sweatshirt or a *Zara* tank top? Why are these garments made of a 100% cotton are so cheap? Why do your clothes have a ‘Made in Bangladesh’ ‘Made in Sri Lanka’ ‘Made in India’ or ‘Made in Pakistan’ tag? It is becoming exceedingly important to consider who is making the clothes we wear; yet, this issue is often overlooked by our trend-setting (and trend-chasing) generation.

South Asian countries have stood at the forefront of garment export in the world, with Bangladesh leading the pack. Six out of ten clothes in the world are made in Bangladesh. Garment export comprises 80% of Bangladesh’s economical export and employs 4 million workers out of which 90% are women. These statistics might suggest that the garment industry is empowering—offering financial independence to the Bangladeshi women it employs. However, behind this virtuous exterior, lies a dark reality which is concealed by the face of strategic advertising and branding.

Left

Bangladeshi woman transporting fabric across a water body polluted with textile waste. Image Credit: No Brand Custom

Below

Sewn garments in a Bangladeshi warehouse after the dyeing process. Image Credit: Reverie Page

transcontinental conversations

To put it plainly, the garment industry is a post-colonial venture: it is the immediate product of colonialism and the constant living reminder of South Asia's colonial past. Especially in Bangladesh, the rise of the garment industry was a direct product of the partition of India and the fall of East Pakistan in the years following the independence of India and Pakistan. With the birth of Bangladesh, jute and tea were prioritized as the most export-oriented goods.

The perils of flood, falling jute fiber prices and a considerable decline in world demand, resulted in the country's economy deteriorating. Soon after, the garment-production sector started to flourish and took over the country's economy. Unmonitored by

international bodies, the garment manufacturing venture became a *colonial* venture which was *created by the West, for the West*, and at *no cost to the West*.

This industry has been formulated to disadvantage women of color and underprivileged minors through the legitimization of unregulated capitalism and modern day slavery encoded in international law. The Bangladeshi government's unquestioning support of the industry has resulted in a blatant dismantling of political frameworks which attempt to support the factory workers. The very fact that export garments have the same road rights as ambulances in Bangladesh is a matter of great concern.



Health & Education For All

While the solution for this global issue might require endless efforts in international and local policy and trade reforms, there are many organizations and individuals who are driving considerable change in the conditions of the garment workers in Bangladesh.

A pioneering project by Dr. Ruhul Abid, through his non-governmental organization '*Health and Education for All*' (HAEFA), was conceived in Providence, at *Brown University*. Abid's initiative aims to provide access to healthcare to disadvantaged groups of people, especially ready-made garment factory workers who often cannot afford to visit doctors as they typically work eleven-hours a day, six days of the week. In an interview Abid outlines the public health crisis in Bangladesh which worsens the conditions for garment workers.

In 2016, Abid developed '*NIROG*' which translates as 'healthy' in Bengali. It is an electronic medical record system which is portable, solar-powered and

does not need electricity or the internet to work. It allows easier follow-up care and patient tracking through photograph and fingerprint identification. This system eliminates the intermediaries of hand-written prescriptions and the burden of transcribing them thereafter.

The technology introduced by HAEFA has helped over 200,000 people in Bangladesh get direct access to healthcare. In 2020, Dr. Abid was nominated to receive a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in Bangladesh.

Ruhul Abid, MD, PhD is an Associate Professor at Brown University Warren Alpert Medical School and Principal Investigator at the Cardiovascular Research Center, Cardiothoracic Surgery Division at Rhode Island Hospital. Dr. Abid has combined careers in research, global health, and teaching of graduate and medical students, and has been utilizing his extensive experience to advance cardiovascular medicine and global health research. Many faculty members, medical students and undergraduate students from Brown University have been actively involved in Dr. Abid's global and international health programs abroad.





“Access to health care overall in Bangladesh is for the upper and middle classes, because they have a private system, the lower classes rely heavily on government health care services, which don’t have all the resources necessary to provide for every citizen.”

— Dr. Ruhul Abid

Above
Bangladeshi workers in a garment factory on the outskirts of Dhaka. Image Credit: Source Unknown

Left
Bangladeshi woman transporting fabric across a water body polluted with textile waste. Image Credit: No Brand Custom



Is it too ambitious to imagine a more equitable and just future for the women of Bangladesh?

Is this what the neoliberal utopian vision of free trade looks like? When local laws favor the raging capitalist agenda of the West, how can we ever expect progress towards sweatshop abolition and human rights enforcement? Local authorities portray the subjugated bodies of women as battlegrounds for empowerment and social justice: where the myth is peddled through the idea that women are uplifting their families out of poverty, to soften the harsh realities of exploitation, abuse and oppression. It is a common misconception that the women who work at these factories choose to do so. Global fashion brands who attempt to justify minimum payment and overworking of garment workers through the idea of female empowerment and upliftment should be urged to reassess their values and philosophies keeping in mind ethical trade and production.

While this topical issue has gained increasing traction in the current climate of social justice news, there is a need for more global attention to instigate greater local pressure and catalyze change for the disadvantaged groups of peoples involved.

As consumers in the West, we must be conscious of the histories of pain and oppression which are interwoven with the fabrics we shroud ourselves in. Conscious capitalism might be the compromise we settle at—moving towards a future where we collectively change our attitudes towards consumption through personal initiative and mindful living.

Right

Textile offcuts in Bangladesh. Image Credit: Mohammed Anwarul. Kabir Choudhury via The Guardian

Left

Bangladeshi workers at a garment factory on the outskirts of Dhaka. Image Credit: NurPhoto via The Guardian

Below

Aerial view of a factory in Bangladesh. Image Credit: Fahad Faisal



Lanka's Tree Wine

Adapted from *The Adventures of the Arrack* by
Michelle Gunawardana, for Rockland Distillery.
Cocktail Recipes from Ceylon Arrack.

YVA

Once upon a time, on an island who was granted many a name—*Serendib, Seilan, Zeilan* and *Ceylon*, to cite a few—a great discovery was made from the flower of the coconut tree. The marvelous coconut is celebrated widely—its tall, slender, sinuous trunk offering up a rustling bouquet of graceful leaves to the sky can instantly evoke all the magic of the tropical island.

What is most extraordinary about the coconut palm is, as Tennent puts it—the marvel of how every part of the coconut tree is put to use. The trunk provides wood for rafters, railings, boats, troughs, furniture and firewood. The young leaves, natively known as *gokkola*, can be woven into decorations for traditional festivals, while the mature leaves make excellent thatch for roofing, mats, and baskets, as well as fodder for cattle and manure. The sturdy, pliant stems of the leaves are used for fences, *kadhas* (yokes), fishing rods, and domestic utensils. Each half-shell of the nut makes a perfect drinking bowl, and the shells can also be made into spoons, knife-handles, or ornaments, and conversely can also be burned to make charcoal that can be used as tooth powder. The fiber that envelopes the shell within the outer husk, coir, is used as well: spun into ropes, bunched in brushed, or used as stuffing for mattresses or cushions, or simply burned as a biofuel.

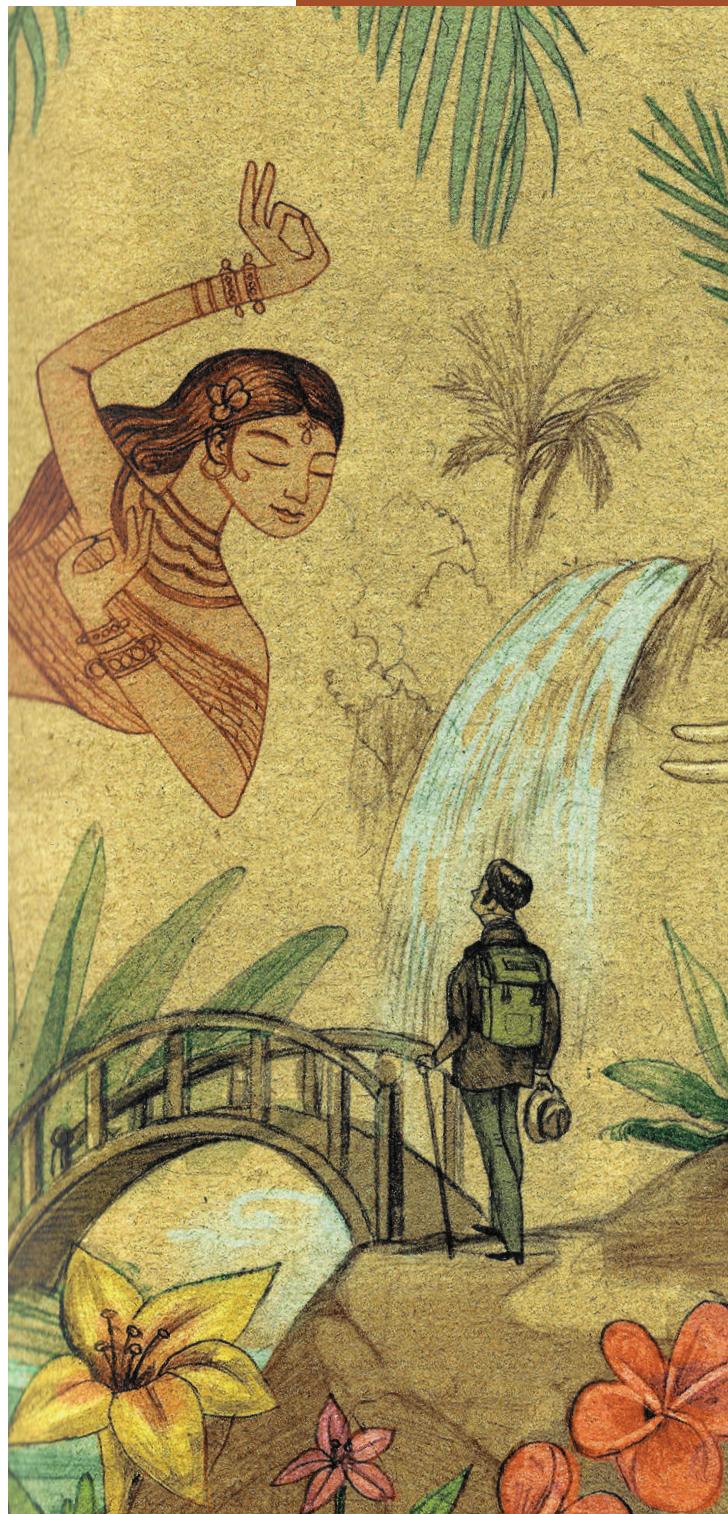


Image Credit: Rockland Distillery



The clear, sweet liquid contained in the nut (especially that of the king coconut palm) is a refreshing drink, naturally rich in rehydration salts. Enjoyed for centuries in Sri Lanka, coconut water has recently become a highly sought-after health drink around the world. The sweet, succulent flesh of the young nut can be eaten as a delicious snack, while the flesh of the mature nut is scraped out, mixed with water and squeezed to yield rich ‘coconut milk’—an essential ingredient in traditional curry.

The flesh also gives rise to edible coconut oil—once wrongfully condemned for its saturated fats—which has now been pronounced perfectly healthy (as the island’s people have always known) and has even become a vegan substitute of choice for baking. In fact, coconut has become the latest health-food darling in the West—exotic and trendy. In South Asia, it adopts many forms ranging from conditioners of the hair to fuel in oil lamps, and even as an essential ingredient in traditional Ayurvedic medicine and domestic spaces. Even the remains of the nut, after the oil has been expresses, are not wasted. Locally known as *poonak*, it is used as cattle fodder and poultry feed.

Finally, the least known part of the coconut is the unopened flower spathe that can be tapped to collect sap, or *toddy*, which when fresh from the tree, makes a healthy drink. However, on the island of Lanka, another use for the *toddy* was found—it was fermented to make vinegar or distilled to create the spirit known as coconut *arrack*.

The late food and travel writer Anthony Bourdain described the resultant liquor’s taste as “*a marriage of bourbon and rum, but with a stronger, burning kick and a mysterious bouquet.*”

Coconut *arrack* is undoubtedly one of the oldest distilled spirits in the world, predating Scotch and Irish whiskies, vodka, gin, and rum. While no one knows when coconut *arrack* was discovered, there are tales of the ancient kings of Lanka feeding their elephants this milky wine, to give them courage before they charged into battle.

In the later period of the Portuguese occupation of Sri Lanka (1505–1658), primitive distilling was an established cottage industry. The industry only flourished under British and Dutch in the following centuries of colonial rule.

Image Credit: Rockland Distillery



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arrack —

Excessive use of alcohol may be injurious to health and impair ability to drive. No party involved endorses the sale or consumption of alcohol to minors.

Arrack was once a Hindi word that encompassed all distilled spirits. Coconut *arrack* is quite distinct from the ‘*arak*’ or ‘*araq*’ that used to be made from fermented fruits (usually dates and raisins) in Africa and the Middle East, and from the Batavia *arrack* distilled from the molasses in Java and Indonesia.

Interestingly, the word ‘punch’ is thought to have been derived from the Hindustani ‘*panchamratam*,’ which means ‘five juice,’ a reference to the number of ingredients for the drink that traditionally were *arrack*, sugar, lime juice, spice, and water.

Making *arrack* is a painstaking process—from the hand-picking of the *toddy* or sap from the coconut palm to the distillation and blending of the spirits. With *arrack* getting more and more famous, in case you find yourself with a bottle in the near future, here are some popular drinks the Sri Lankans enjoy with their local spirit.



the — aliya

about

Arrack and coconut—much like yin and yang—are inextricably linked. The local islanders love to drink their arrack with coconut water, and it dates back to the days of the kings of Lanka, when it was served to the royal elephants before battle. In fact, *Aliya* means ‘elephant’ in Sri Lanka.

Chilled Coconut Water — 100ml

50ml — Arrack

Fresh Lime Wedge —

* For an equally refreshing taste, the coconut water can be substituted with a good-quality ginger ale.

method

Pour Ceylon Arrack over large cubes of ice, top up with chilled coconut water and serve with a wedge of zesty lime. Another great alternative is to make ice cubes from coconut water, gently pour Ceylon Arrack over them and serve in a coconut shell or rocks glass.



Image Credit: Ceylon Arrack

arrack — julab

about

Drinking this fragrant cocktail is an experience as sensorial as an amble through an Arabic spice market is, so its name, *Julab*—or ‘perfume’—is apt. Don’t be fooled by the aromatic sweetness. This cocktail, created by the team at *Nightjar* in London, is stronger than you think.



Arrack ————— 25ml

25ml ————— Rum

Turkish Delight Syrup ————— 12.5ml

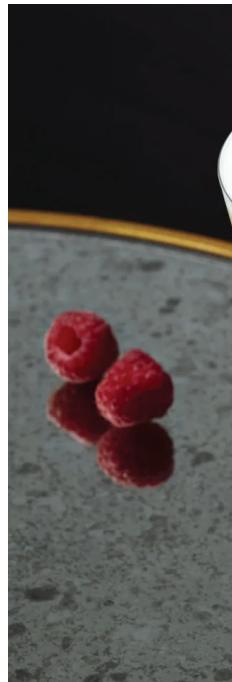
3 dashes ————— Absinthe

arabic bitters ————— cardamom ————— anise

liquorice ————— rose ————— green tea

coffee ————— cinnamon ————— mint

Image Credit: Ceylon Arrack



method

Mix all the ingredients, shake well and strain into a Turkish coffee pot, and even consider topping it up with a splash of champagne. Garnish with rose buds and a piece of Turkish delight.



coco — moratuwa



about

Named after *Moratuwa*, a coastal suburb of the Sri Lankan city of Colombo, this cocktail is as uplifting as sea air and sunshine—a sweet, refreshing blend of *Ceylon Arrack*, honey, lemon, coconut sugar syrup and spicy Velvet Falernum. It was created by Andrew Gray and listed by Charlene Holt at *Apotheca Bar* in Manchester, England.



method

Stir the lemon juice with the honey and coconut sugar syrup. Once the honey is well diluted, add some cubed ice, the *Ceylon Arrack* and the Velvet Falernum. Shake and finely strain the mix into a short glass and garnish with a lemon wheel and maraschino cherry.





Combat on the Carpet

YVA

The tradition of weaving and hand-knotting rugs has been at the cultural and artistic heart of Afghanistan for many centuries. Afghan carpets would usually be categorized as *Khal Moammadi* (the carpets which were knotted by Afghans) or *Afghan Aqche* (the carpets which were knotted by Turkmen in Afghanistan). Despite coming from different communities, the general features of both carpets remained similar. The predominant colors would be in the red spectrum, with smatterings of earth-toned beiges and indigo-toned geometric floral designs. The most striking pattern would be guided by the *göl*, an octagonal row pattern, and the star. Some of the rug designs are based on the *charbagh*, a quadrilateral layout inspired by the four gardens of Paradise described in the *Qur'an*. However, depending on the community where the carpets were being woven and knotted, the use of symbology, imagery, placement and scale would vary.

These carpets were well-acclaimed in the international market and proved to be a valuable export for Afghanistan. However, the 1979 Soviet Invasion marked the dawn of a dark era in the country. Afghanistan experienced extreme political upheaval and economic downfall and a large amount of socio-cultural distress. The tumultuous environment in which the people of Afghanistan lived tellingly found its way into the art and craft of the time.





Rug producers, provoked by decades of traders and invaders in the country, adapted traditional motifs and compositions to create a new sub-sect within the realm of Afghani handwoven rugs. The basic geometric patterns and floral motifs transformed into highly stylized visuals of arms, helicopters, grenades, tanks, and even life-size army generals standing sternly in ruined landscapes. These symbols were, at first, subtle additions, and were later emphasized for a niche market of Western collectors. This movement of contemporizing a traditional craft resulted in the creation of the highly-coveted ‘Afghan War Rugs’.

One of the first avid collectors of Afghan war rugs, Kevin Sudeith, explains why he was so impressed with the craftsmanship of the Afghani rugs. As noted by Sudeith, there are inherent similarities between traditional rugs and avant-garde war rugs. Certain war rugs seem to emulate the symmetric sensibilities of the Afghani weavers. Even with imagery that reflected the turbulence of the Afghani landscape, the overall composition of the carpet seems to be geometric and oriented entirely around the center *göl*. The general motifs of florals and botanicals as well as the geometric borders persist in modern adaptations as well.

“The thing that awed me about the war rugs ... is the combination of a very ancient tradition and ancient designs and patterns that are tied to specific towns and regions of Afghanistan ... coupled with the most contemporary subject matter,” Sudeith says. “And the war rugs document that unselfconsciously, succinctly and beautifully.”

— Kevin Sudeith





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Afghan War Rug designed in the form of a prayer-mat with a mihrab, depicting helicopters, fighter jets, tanks and fragmentation grenades, possibly made by Taimani women, completed in the early 1980s. Image Credit: The Trustees of the British Museum

Afghan War Rug depicting the events at World Trade Center, completed in 2004. Images Credit: The Trustees of the British Museum

These eclectic rugs can be enjoyed as avant-garde textiles and as participants in the modernisation of a thousand-year old tradition. The myriad of associations one can make between these rugs and the history, politics, culture, and religion of Afghanistan offer a multitude of possibilities for interpretation. They represent an encounter of a timeless aesthetic tradition with the violent reality of contemporary South Asia. The canvas of the carpet serves as a storytelling topography. Certain carpets depict specific events in an extremely graphic manner and revolutionize the art of storytelling. One of the most well-known of these depictions are the carpets which narrate the story of the 9/11 attacks.

The 9/11 carpets are almost diagrammatic: the visual of the World Trade Center dominates the canvas of the carpet, and all the surrounding images are labeled concisely to narrate the story of the 2001 attacks. From the date ‘11 SEPTEMBER 2001,’ to the flight numbers of the commercial American and United Aircrafts which flew into the towers, the entire scene is depicted on the carpet. The detail of the visuals is stunning: one can clearly differentiate the commercial aircrafts from the military aircrafts and the missiles. The *gadh* (base) of the carpet presents the map of Afghanistan, and in perspective, the map of the United States, from which arise the Twin Towers. The map of Afghanistan in the background can also be symbolic of the yearning of the refugee

weavers (who relocated to Pakistan during the 2001 attacks) to return to their homes in Sheberghan and Mazar-e Sharif.

One of the most important images in the carpet is that of the dove which flies across the breadth of the rug with an olive branch in its beak. It is shadowed with a backdrop of the American and Afghani flags. As a universal symbol of peace and harmony, not only does it signify the quest for peace in Afghanistan but also the general sentiment of the Afghani public. The use of floral designs surrounding the quotidian images of the Afghani landscape similarly reflects the longing for more peaceful times.

After the attacks, Afghanistan became synonymous with the American war on terrorism. Their regional craftsmanship became a way to separate themselves from the inescapable, pernicious stereotypes of the ‘Afghan’ during the Bush Era. Carrie Hertz, the curator of textiles and dress at the Museum of International Folk Art, puts it beautifully: “To me, this signals not a glorification of what’s happening but a hope for reconciliation.” The decorative border, then, represents hope for a better future.

The design of war rugs, though, serves a more complex function than signifying a desire for peace. It remains unclear whether they are a celebration of modernity or a reflection of its destructive impulses? Are they a witness to shared trauma or a

11
SEPTEMBER
2001



FIRST IMPACT
AMERICAN FLIGHT 11



TIE TEADAS WEAPONS IN THE
AMERICAN AFGHANISTAN



IMPACT UNITED
FLIGHT 175





Afghan War Rug depicting US Predator Drones with a Turkmen Border, completed in 2016. Image Credit: Kevin Sudeith, War Rug

criticism of the commercialisation of violence? Are they testaments to ingenuity and a spirit of survival? Regardless of their intended political content, the emergence of war-related imagery aided the economic survival of area weavers and displaced craftspeople through years of armed conflict and cultural disruption.

To date, most of the weavers of these rugs in Afghanistan and Pakistan are women, and it is these women who are at the forefront of the war rug movement. They managed to create economic independence through the sustenance of this craft. After decades of guerrilla warfare, including the American and Soviet Invasions and a brutal civil war, Afghanistan was conquered by the Taliban in the 1990s and was governed with unyielding Sharia Law. Purdah or female seclusion had become a compulsory practice, but women weavers found ways to exercise their economic and social independence. Craft served as a platform for emancipation and empowerment.

The women of Afghanistan, who have for decades now been hidden behind the veil, have shown an abundance of courage in their effort to preserve craft, obtain social and financial independence, and fearlessly narrate the stories of the lives they live as refugees of war.

The representation of their surroundings display their perspectives of the war and smaller details about their individual lives. Hertz says: "They have secrets in the rug, like the initials of the boy they like, or colors, or something that reflects from her soul to the carpet. Anything she cannot express, she can put on the carpet. Most of the girls have lost some relatives to war. War was the main topic of conversation in their lives. My perspective? I think it's kind of sad to have something of this emotional impact from teenagers." In more than one way, these carpets serve as spaces for narrative discourse that explore personal, political, and social paradigms of the peoples and place of Afghanistan.

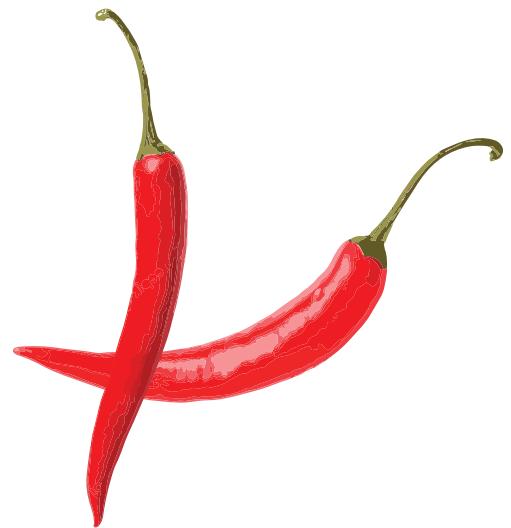
Afghan War Rug of an Army General's Portrait, acquired in Peshawar in 1985. Image Credit: Annemaria Sawkins and Enrico Mascellino



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Amma's Rasam ST

A love affair with food in the Asian American mesocosm—



The Chicago cold had bleached the brick apartment complex a flavorless cool gray. Only a breeze stirred, the birds and traffic still asleep; a faint blue glow had made its way onto the second floor of a brick building, through the plastic blinds and seated itself against the corner of the mattress to accompany its lone inhabitant. Having just woken up, Ganapathi's dry eyes still made sense of the bedroom, looking side to side, while his body remained still under the heavy floral bedsheets.

He looked around the bare room towards the stack of suitcases serving as a makeshift table, and then at the wall clock that he had seated on top of it, not having had the chance to put it up. Taking note of the time, he sluggishly stretched while his hand reached under the bed to locate his glasses. A quick shower perfumed by the scent of Mysore sandalwood soap and an agnostic prayer to the prints of the Hindu pantheon that his mother had packed for him led Ganapathi to breakfast. He wasn't especially short on time, but cooking in the morning was never something he enjoyed. Two slices of bread were crushed into a sandwich-maker. A watery coffee was brewed and mixed with an intense amount of sugar and hot milk, then poured back and forth between two mugs until a layer of foam began hissing. The light on the sandwich-maker turned green and Ganapathi picked out the partially browned trian-



gular pieces of bread and put them on a plate, lightly brushing them with spreadable butter and sprinkling them with a small pinch of salt. He then reached into his cupboard and grabbed a jar of roasted cashews, and shaked a few out on top of his toast. He knew that this was an abnormal garnish for buttered bread, but at that moment he was craving something far more comforting. He had immigrated to America, the glorified land of dreams, never once thinking about the small memories hidden in morsels of rice and sips of filter coffee that he would be leaving behind. With the sensation of homesickness and regret rolling around in his stomach, he gnawed on his breakfast thinking about home.

Every Saturday morning, in his small home nestled at the foothills of Trichy's Rockfort, Ganapathi's mom would cook a hurried breakfast to feed the



family of six before rushing to the temple. Even in his sleep he could hear the pressure cooker billowing like a steam engine, this monstrous alarm paired with the sticky amber sunlight that poured into his windows woke him up with a sense of great animation. His father would have already left early in the morning to check on their farm lands on the city outskirts, so Ganapathi could get away with eating without having showered or prayed. And so, he brushed his teeth at the little sink at the back of the house, listening to the sizzle of ginger, curry leaves, asafoetida, black peppercorns, and cashews being fried in *ghee*. As he raised his head up from the basin, the deep aroma of hot rice and lentils blew through the gated window of the kitchen. He would peek in to see his mom presenting the large vat of the steaming *pongal* to their cabinet of gods.

She would pretend not to take notice of him so that her prayers seemed more austere and focused, so Ganapathi would leave and seat himself beside his brothers and sister on the floor. None of them seemed nearly as eager for breakfast, how could they be? *Pongal* was his favorite food, especially since mother made it to his liking.

She came out fixing the loose end of her *sari* across her waist and sat beside her children to serve, onto each of their stainless steel plates, a large mound of the rice. Everyone else got a spoon of *chutney* alongside their breakfast, but not little Ganapathi—he liked to savor the *pongal* on its own. For a moment he would stare at the creamy goodness of mashed rice and pulses, then he would poke around at the plate of liquid gold to make sure that his mother did indeed give him extra cashews and fewer peppercorns.

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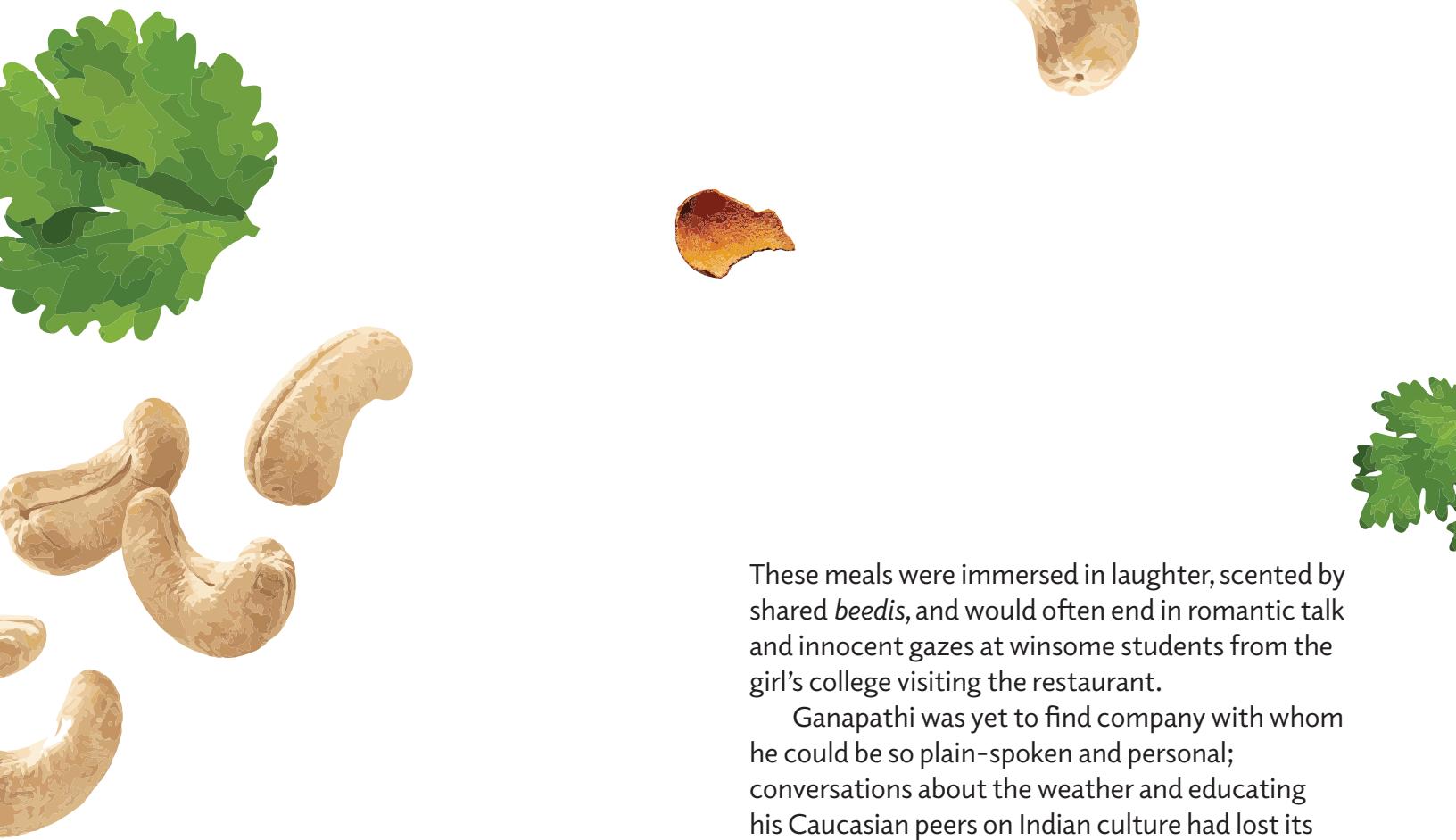
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“Don’t sniff your food, only swines sniff!” His father would say, but since he wasn’t there, Ganapathi would cherish the aroma of cashews in *ghee* while his mother would feed.

Today, the toast did no justice to this memory. Bread was not nearly as good of a canvas to flavor as the steamy rice, the butter spread lacked the deep golden hue of his mother’s homemade *ghee*, and his packaged cashews lacked the sharp nutty punch of freshly roasted cashews. Missing that satiating warmth, Ganapathi gulped down his breakfast.

He slipped a wool jumper over his striped shirt and then picked out the pair of well-polished brown leather shoes that waited in the little space between the front door and couch. Stepping out of his apartment, one hand checked the locks while the other checked his pockets and bag to make sure he had taken everything he needed. Ganapathi walked to the train station leaving behind the one thing that he had prepared for today: his tiffin box, filled with leftovers from the night before.



Ganapathi's walk from the train station to his office building requires him to cut through the infamous winds of downtown Chicago. Despite his attempt to retain a sense of professional composure, the cold wind forcefully blew his lanky frame back, biting his once sun-kissed skin. Ganapathi looked around the busy streets attempting to evoke a sense of sonder and relatability in this foreign world. He walked past the little cafe on the ground floor of his office building that he frequents with his colleagues during breaks. Their company was as bland as the stale croissants and watery Americanos; he still spent many of his breaks pretending to savor the stale snacks and their friendship. Although Ganapathi had always excelled in English at school, a candid conversation with friends in Tamil was unmatched.

He recalls the first time he left home to go to a small boys college in Chennai. Weekly, he and his friends would go to a small street-side restaurant to escape the surveillance of their hostel wardens and professors. Taking over a large table for themselves, the boys sat over tumblers of frothy filter coffee and flaky Malabar *parathas* drenched in spicy *salna*, and would converse unreservedly in words that Ganapathi didn't know existed until his time at college.

These meals were immersed in laughter, scented by shared *beedis*, and would often end in romantic talk and innocent gazes at winsome students from the girl's college visiting the restaurant.

Ganapathi was yet to find company with whom he could be so plain-spoken and personal; conversations about the weather and educating his Caucasian peers on Indian culture had lost its appeal very rapidly.

It was after hours of working at his desk that Ganapathi reached behind his bag in search of his lunch. Coming to the realization that he had forgotten his leftovers, Ganapathi started a dejected walk to the cafeteria on the second floor in the hopes of finding something to add to the toast in his stomach. He directly went to the cooler at the back corner and picked out a sandwich and proceeded to check out. The cashier smiled and scanned the sandwich while Ganapathi pulled out a few bills to pay. As he handed the cash he looked over at the turkey sandwich.

"Actually I can't get that. I'm vegetarian, do you know if I can find anything vegetarian today?" he asked. The woman smiles, raising her eyebrows, "I think they're serving veggies with the chicken, you can ask for just that. And we might be doing fish tacos for dinner in about an hour and a half if you'd want to wait. Do you eat fish?"

Ganapathi nodded while thanking her. His *Brahmin* family were strictly vegetarian and adhered sternly to their religious guidelines. His father wouldn't even eat onions or garlic as they were deemed fit for Brahmins, so his mother would at times secretly cook onion *sambhar* on a small stove in their backyard. Growing up in such an unyielding family, Ganapathi



couldn't even imagine trying meat of any kind. There was however the one time, two years ago, that Ganapathi had returned from the *Diwali* break with his family—he leapt off the train that he had spent the greater part of the last two days on, with an intense hunger sending cramps throughout his body. Ganapathi was glad that his train arrived thirty minutes past rush hour, when all the platforms would have been overflowing with sweaty people tackling each other to board their trains. However, he soon learnt that post rush hour meant that all the food stalls had been closed.

He considered waiting till he got home to cook something but the pain emanating from his stomach insisted otherwise. He walked over to the only food stall that he saw, and unable to read the Hindi board, stuck his head over its front to see what was being made.

The short man behind the store looked up asking Ganapathi if he wanted a bread omelette: a local savory French toast of some sort, seasoned with spices, tomatoes, onions, chili peppers, and cilantro. He had never eaten eggs—another food debarred to his people. But his immense hunger and the smell of the *masalas* convinced him to take a try. And in his broken Hindi he said “I'll have one plate” and immediately paid the man a few *rupees*.

The man then loudly started preparing the bread omelette, theatrically banging his spatula against the skillet to make for a more performative cooking session. Ganapathi, looked away the entire time, unable to digest the fact that he was going to eat eggs. The goopy egg whites looked phlegmy and the yolks too similar a yellow to chicks. Despite this, when the man handed him the paper plate,



Ganapathi grabbed it with haste and began devouring the meal without allowing himself a second to regret his decision. Guilt did follow, and that too immensely. Ganapathi was ashamed for having consumed eggs and didn't enjoy a meal for the next few days. The thought of the bread omlette plagued his appetite.

As he stands here holding the turkey sandwich, he reminds himself to disallow his hunger from getting the better of him. He would wait until dinner to eat, promising himself a hearty South Indian meal. Ganapathi locked his front door behind him just as the last periwinkle of sunlight dims out. He doesn't wait a minute before dropping his bag and washing his hands to start cooking dinner. He measured out a cup of rice in a metal measuring cylinder and repeatedly washed it. The smell of the starchy water, albeit not a pleasant one, was foreplay for the warm meal that awaited him. His fingers, fiddled with the soaking rice, wishing to grasp a healthy moundful of it and shove it in his mouth. He imagined his esophagus struggling to take in the scorching rice. With each successive wash, his patience grows thinner as the water grows clear. He rammed the rice and some legumes into the small pressure cooker and threw on its whistle while simultaneously dicing tomatoes for his *rasam*. Quickly rinsing out his red glass vessels: a pan to reheat leftover okra, and a pot to simmer the *rasam* in; he reached into the cupboard right above the stove top to grab the jar of





tamarind puree. The dark and earthy nectar would transform his amateur cooking to the likeness to real South Indian food. It added a depth of flavor unmatched and irreplaceable flavor: tamarind is the keystone to the making of many Tamil dishes.

Ganapathi grabbed the jar and twisted off its sticky lid as the first explosion of steam ruptured from the top of the pressure cooker. As the steam dissipated, Ganapathi's saddened face showed through: there was no tamarind left in the jar. There were a few other things that he could have put together with his rice and left over okra, or he could have made a sandwich, pasta, or another foreign dish. But all that Ganapathi craved at that moment was some comfort, it was what he had wanted all day. The empty jar of tamarind was the last straw. He walked out of his neighborhood and down towards the shopping complex tucked away behind the park. The sky

was dark—everything seemed asleep apart from the pain knotting his stomach and intestines together into a formless mound of emaciated flesh. His long legs took small steps through the intermittent artificial warmth of street lights. Each one reminded him of the comforts of home. Landing this job was one of the biggest moments in his life, he fissured past many limitations restricting him to meager jobs and had made his way to America.

Ganapathi abandoned all that was familiar and arrived in the country last December around midnight with two suitcases and an address scribbled on a small chit of paper. An Iranian taxi driver had pulled up next to him offering to drive him to the flat that he had temporarily shared until he found his current apartment. They drove for over an hour around and around trying to find the hidden street. The driver very patiently flipped through his maps while Ganapathi used the taxi's mobile phone to call his roommates' landline. He recalled shivering intensely, mostly due to the unimaginable cold, but partly due to a deep fear that churned in his stomach: had he made a mistake coming here?

Questioning himself, he clutched onto his passport, drawing from it an imaginary warmth. This passport, that so many are denied, was his assurance that he belonged here, in America.

Just as his passport had provided him comfort on that cold night, months ago, Ganapathi now found himself in front of a small sign of warmth. Flickering in the corner of his eye was a flashing light. He heard the hum of a Bollywood song resonating from behind the store's glass front. As he made his way to it, looking at the text on the awning illuminated by string lights: 'Delhi House.'

Excitement arose and he whispered thanking providence for walking him here: an Indian restaurant, a mere half-hour walk from his new apartment.



He stepped into the restaurant rubbing his cold hands together and looked around the brightly lit room. It was obvious that the space was converted from some other sort of deli or restaurant, the multi-colored walls were covered with watercolor paintings of rural Indian scenes. String lights and battery powered candles adorned the place, creating some sort of semblance to the abundant light decorating the streets of India around this time of year, during *Diwali*. Some tables had different chairs than others, some had different plates and water pitchers; it was by no means a luxurious restaurant, but Ganapathi's mouth watered and hunger grew stronger nevertheless. He stared around the empty room for a minute, waiting to be seated down when an elderly man, dressed in a shirt a size too small for his potbelly, came in. He saw Ganapathi from a distance and immediately said: "*Bacha, bandh hai, staff nahi he.*"

"*Hindi nahi,*" unsure if what he said made sense, he repeated in English "I don't know Hindi."

The owner came forth squinting and asked "*tum Madrasi ho?*" - are you a *Madrasi*? *Madrasi* was a negligent, mildly derogatory name given to South Indian people. Indians by their northern brothers, but Ganapathi was in no mood to correct him, and even if he had wanted to, he was not schooled in enough Hindi to do so.

"Yes, are you serving? I was hungry and walked very far." Ganapathi slowly responded with appropriate bodily gestures.

The old man stood still for a moment and then his emotionless eyes dropped with a look of care and pity. He didn't understand all too much of what Ganapathi had said, nor did his hand gestures do



much convincing, but the restaurant owner could see on Ganapathi's face the same pain, struggle, and hunger that he himself felt when he went to bed every now and then.

With a sigh of fatigue, he gestured towards a seat towards the back of the restaurant, far from the cold of the front door and said "*Baitho.*" Sit.

The owner flipped the sign on the glass front to 'closed' and came back with a menu for Ganapathi to look at. "I am Jagdish, from Bhopal."

"Ganapathi, from Trichy" they shake hands. Once again Jagdish waited looming over Ganapathi as he looked through the menu. He stands motionless, not with impatience as Ganapathi presumed, but with a look of paternal affection.

"*Rasam?*" Jagdish asks.

Ganapathi looked up in disbelief, did he read his mind, or was he once again poking fun at him being



South Indian? Jagdish flipped through the menu for him and pointed at the soup section under which two options read: ‘rasam soup’ and ‘cream of tomato soup’. Ganapathi looked up with a smile and nodded while asking to get some more time to look through the entrées. Jagdish walked back to the kitchen and disappeared for a few minutes while the lone customer glanced through the remainder of the options solely thinking about the bowl of warmth that was coming his way.

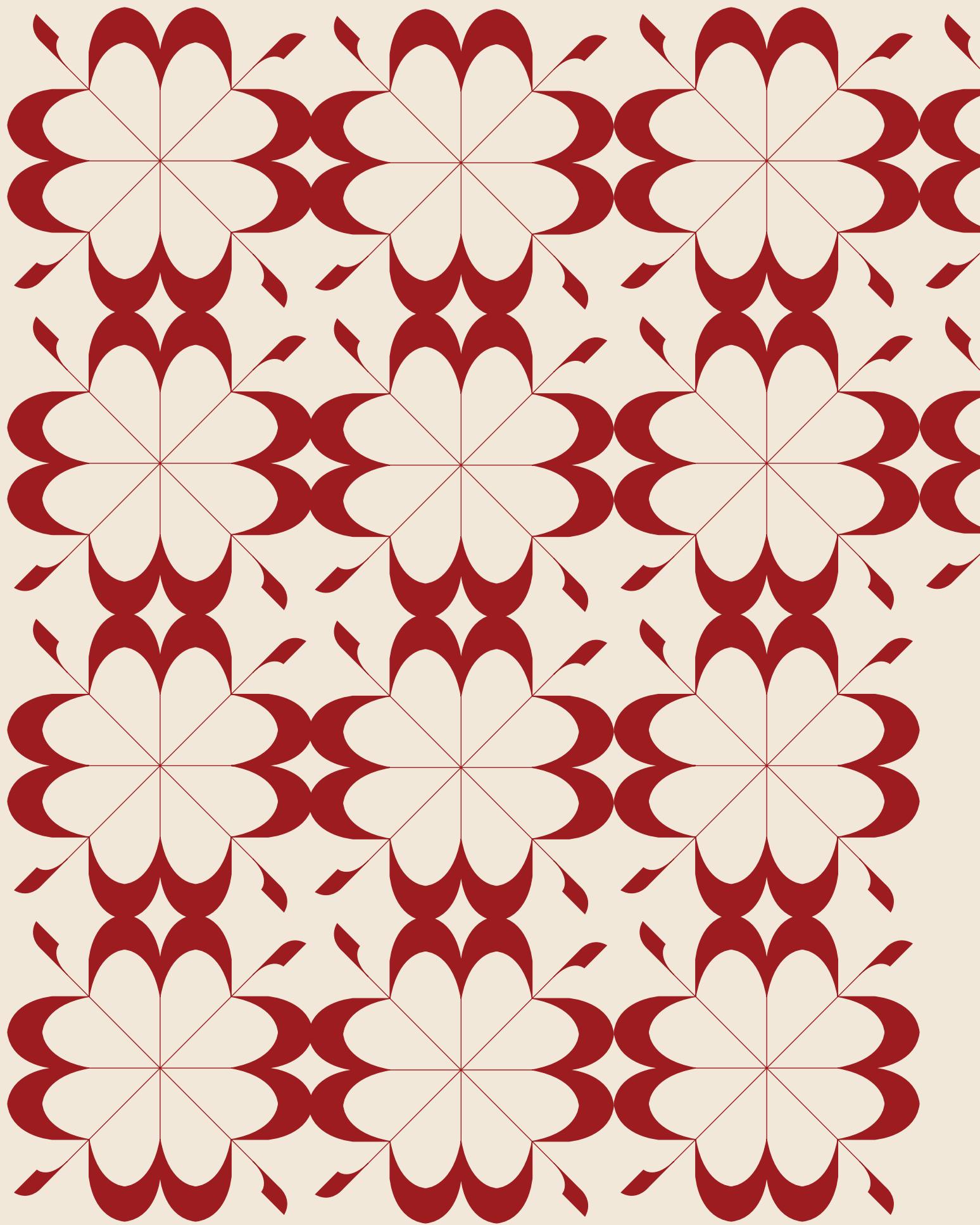
Jagdish soon arrived bearing a ceramic bowl on a tray from which whispers of steam piroquet. As he set the bowl down, Jagdish took the remainder of the order and walked inside, giving Ganapathi and his long awaited meal some privacy. He looked at the bowl of tamarind and tomato broth and the pool of mustard seeds and cilantro in sesame oil floating on top. The spiced aroma tickled his nose, and without waiting one second longer, he took the soup spoon, stirred the bowl and sipped. He leaned back into the comfort, allowing his tired shoulders to drop down.

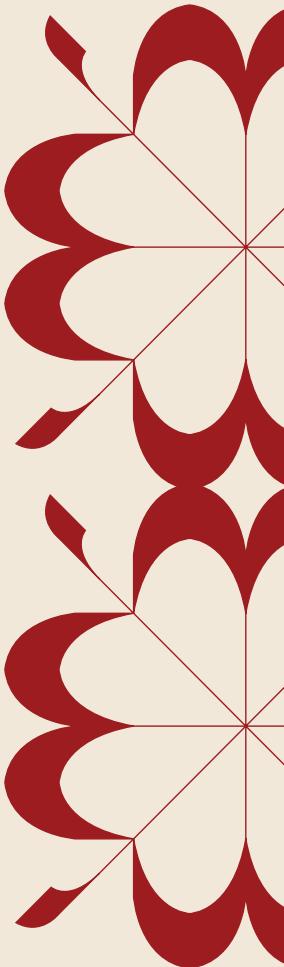
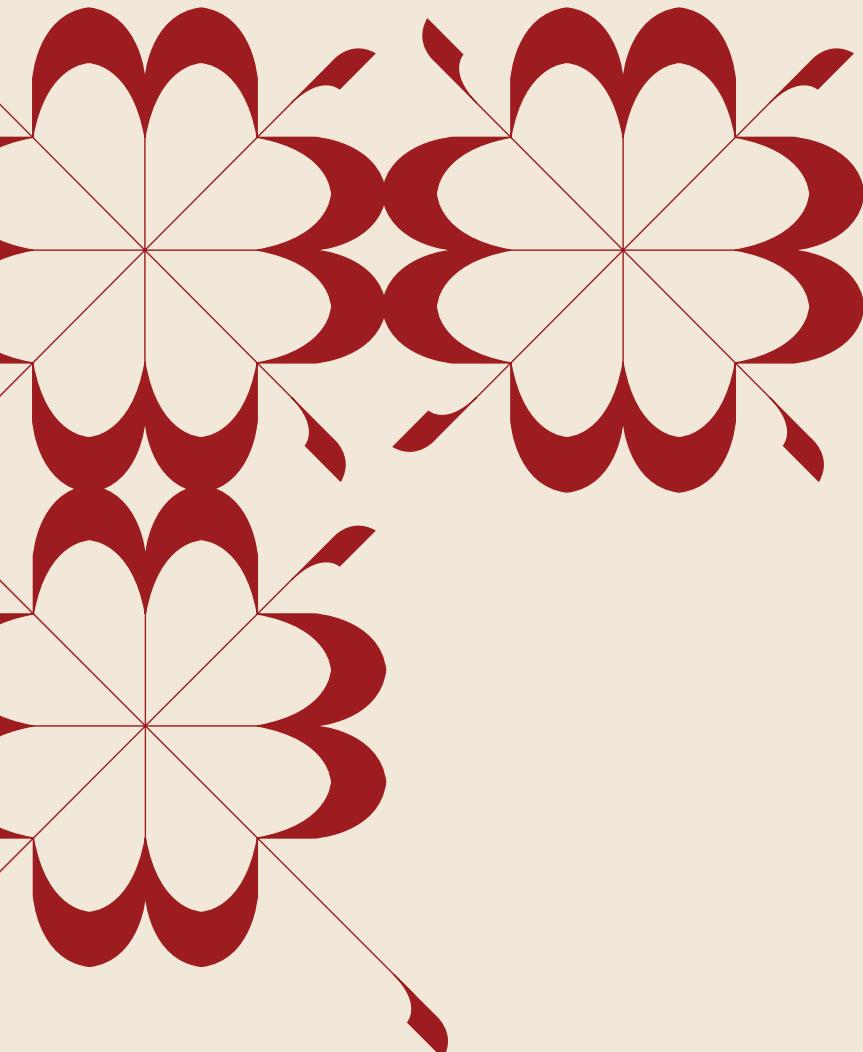
He looked at the corner of the room where Jagdish stood and smiled at him. Truth be told, the *rasam* was rather ordinary, and one sip of broth did not fulfill his day’s hunger; but Ganapathi was satiated—he felt at home.

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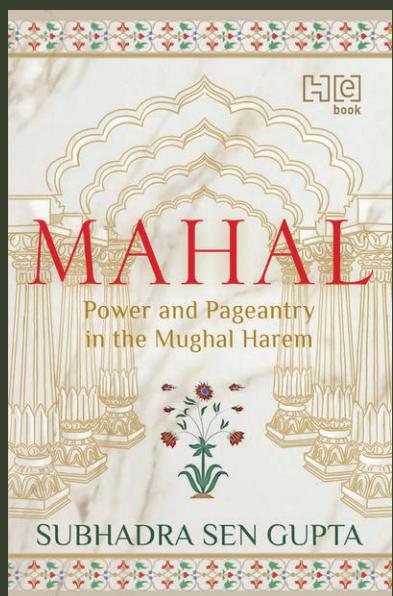




Literary Musings



Jahanara Begum beside Shah Jahan as he passes, 1902, oil on board, Abanindranath Tagore. Image Credit: Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata



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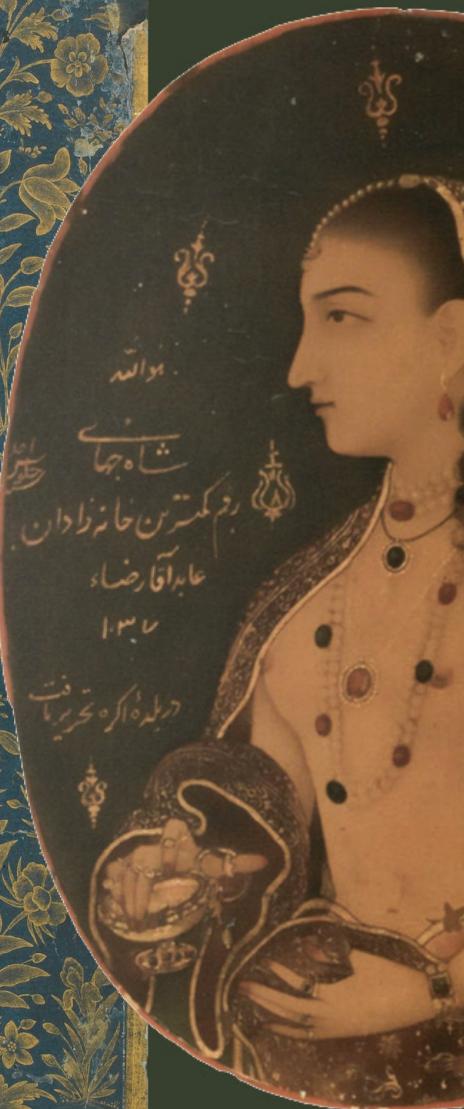
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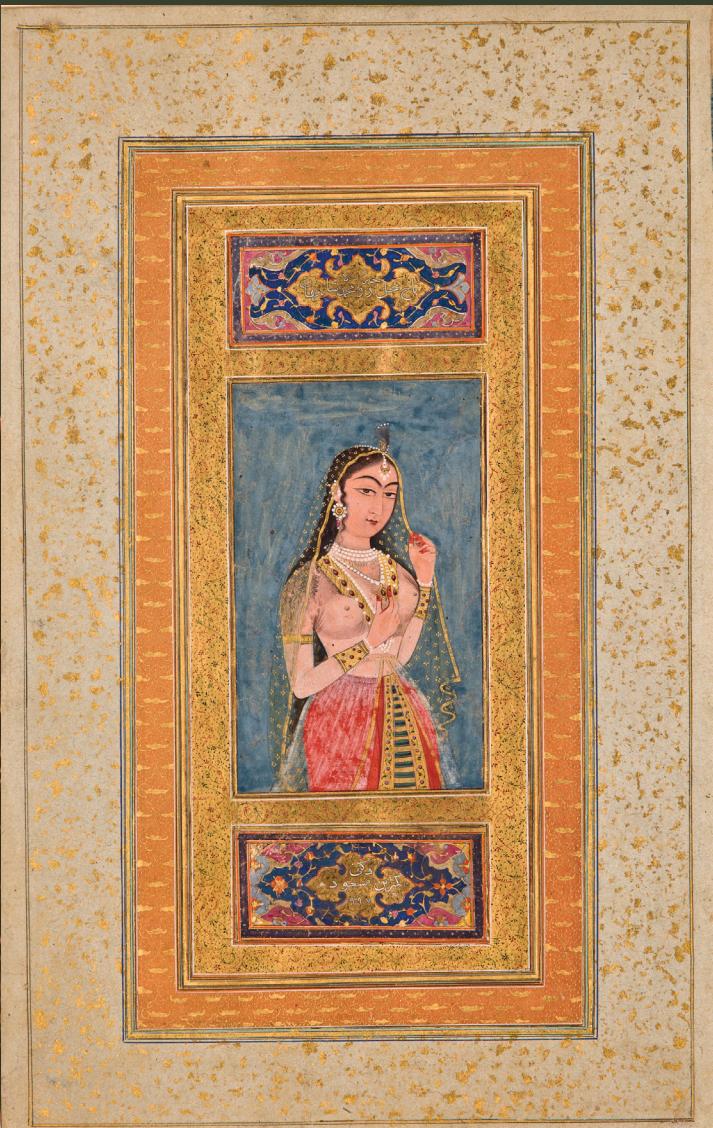
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A Book Review of Mahal (Power and Pageantry in the Mughal Harem) by Subhadra Sen Gupta

Women of the Mughal Harem

YVA





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Portrait of Arjumand Banu Begam, commonly known as Mumtaz Mahal, painted on the cover of a mirror case, ca. 1628, attributed to 'Abid Aqa Riza Shah Jahini. Image Credit: Freer Gallery of Art

Left
Jahangir and Prince Khurram with Nur Jahan, ca. 1624, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Image Credit: Google Arts & Culture

Right
Portrait of Nur Jahan, ca. 1775-1799, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Image Credit: ArtNet

Vividly imagined as an abode for sexual appetite and pleasure, the royal *harems* of Mughal India continue to be an unearthed mystery in most history books, an exciting figment of our imaginations.

Unlike the conventional depictions of royal *harems* in popular culture, the *haramsara* is not a sexual playground, but a sacred familial space.

Transcending the rivalry of the tumultuous outside world, they served as sanctuaries to women and children. Subhadara Sen Gupta gives us an insight into these lives: a rare glimpse behind the veil.

In the book, we travel through time, and witness the constant dynamism of the *harem*: the perennially evolving roles of the women. The independence of the women deteriorated as the empire shifted its epicenter from Ferghana to Kabul, and later, to the heart of modern-day North India. The seclusion of women started as a mere matter of security but turned into an oppression of movement and freedom, making revolution harder for Mughal women, particularly during the later periods of Akbar and Jahangir's rule.

Despite the tightened security, women like Nur Jahan shattered glass ceilings from behind the *purdah*. She was the de facto ruler of the empire and ‘minted coins, traded with foreign merchants, managed promotions and finances at the court, orchestrated new developments in arts and religions, and laid out many of the Mughal gardens we now know,’ all from the enclosure of the *harem*.

This book unravels untold reality of Mughal women like Nur Jahan, Babur’s grandmother Ehsan Daulat Begam and Shah Jahan’s eldest daughter Jahanara Begum, who were instrumental in chartering the path of the Mughal Empire in India and in changing the course of history, but rarely are mentioned in any books or historical records. Sen Gupta collects snippets of information from sources such as the original translations of the *Babar-Nama* and the *Humayun-Nama* (which was written by Humayun’s sister Gulbadan Begum); contemporary writings by European scholars and travelers such as Ralph Fitch, Francois Bernier and Niccolao Manucci; and biographies of the royalty to weave together a credible and thoroughly

researched account of the stories of the unsung heroes (or rather, heroines) of the Mughal era.

The reader is taken on a journey across the landscape of the Mughal dynasty through the watchful eyes of Mughal women like Begum Begum, the first Mughal woman to become a builder and lay the path for the next generation of women to create mosques, madrasas and mausoleums. We also see Maham Begum, the only woman to be seated on a throne beside the emperor; and Jahanara Begum, a connoisseur of literature and poetry, as well as a merchant and philanthropist. Jahanara Begum was also the only woman in the Mughal period to write her own biography.

The reader witnesses the role that each of these women played in the construction of the Mughal empire and its legacy. Sen Gupta provides a compelling case on the manner in which the firm but gentle hand of these women shaped the course of Indian history: a new retrospective insight into the mysterious lives within the *harems*, hidden behind the veil of modesty, a vehicle of oppression and simultaneous emancipation. A must read for any and every one.

Right
Nur Jahan holding a portrait of Emperor Jahangir, ca. 1627, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Image Credit: The Cleveland Museum of Art





Ladies on a Terrace, ca. 1700-1710,
opaque watercolor and gold on paper.
Image Credit: Brooklyn Museum

The Malabar Mango

YVA

a story in a photo-text

The Malabar strip is strewn
with magnificence: the
magnificence of the Malabar Mango.



Kachhi Keri (raw mango) and Pukka Aam (ripe mango) on a Branch, 1814, Calcutta, watercolor on paper, from an album of Company School Botanical Studies by the master artist Sita Ram.
Image Credit: Arts of Hindostan

Left

Parrot Perched on a Mango Tree with a Ram Tethered Below, ca. 1630 – 1670, attributed to Golconda, opaque watercolor and gold on paper.
Image Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Right

Parrot, ca. 1870, Patna, watercolor on paper, from an album of Company School Botanical Studies by Bahadur Lal II. Image Credit: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Often, before the Mango can be plucked and savored by the common man, it is feasted upon by the parrots and parakeets of the Malabar strip.

Our parrots, the messengers of divinity, (for they alone—in the entire animal kingdom—can utter the human word, recite the *Vedas*, and guide man's folly) soar down from their homes to take a bite of a delicacy more luscious than any of the feasts of cornucopia present in the heavens.

And back to their masters they bring not the mango that shines atop the tree, but the leaf which modestly hangs in the shadows of the magnificent Malabar Mango.



Kamadeva on his Parrot Mount, with a Wielded Bow and Arrow, ca. 1800s, opaque watercolor on paper. Image Credit: Musée National des Arts Asiatiques Guimet

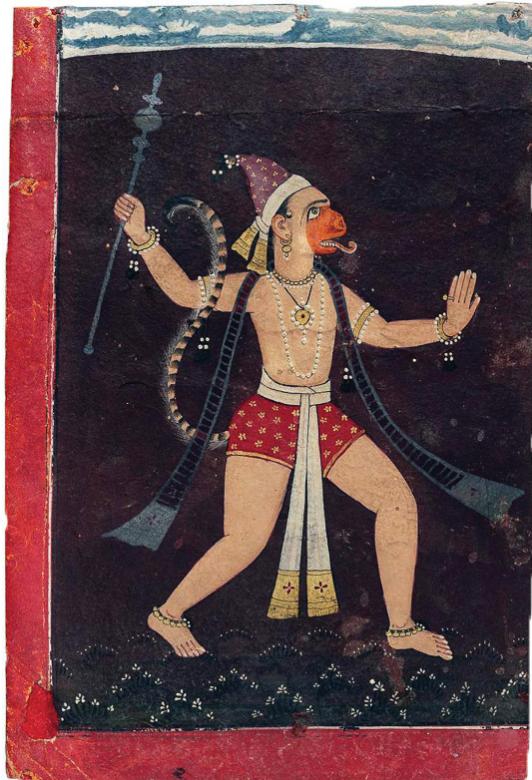


The leaf, pierced onto the spear of the amorous *Kama Deva*: Cupid of the Indian Subcontinent, travels the length and breadth of the land, entangling, commoners and the gods alike, in the unbreakable ropes of love and destiny.

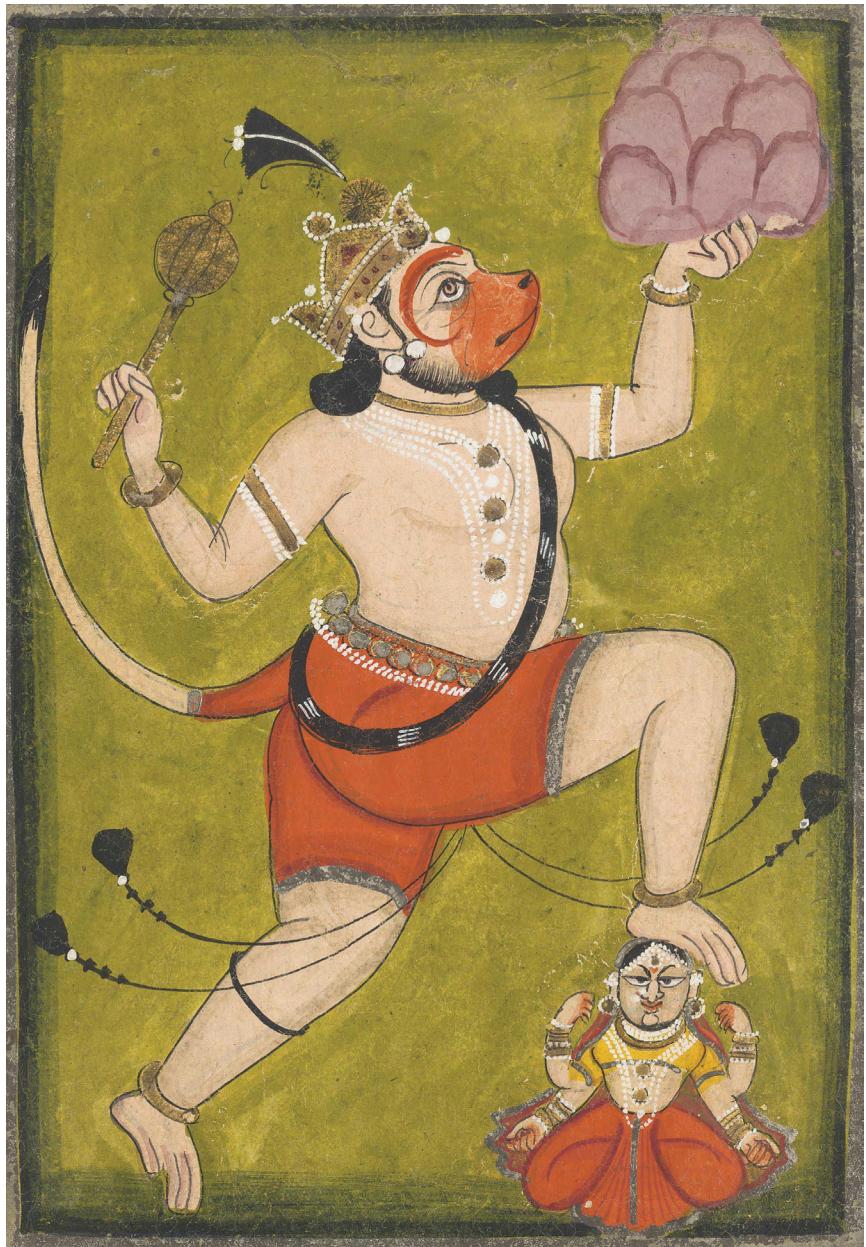
The mango leaf is capable of sparking a love so pure that it triumphs on the battlefields of human emotion—vanquishing infatuation, jealousy, and lust.

Shielded by the purity of *Kama's* love, *Vishnu* lounges on the edge of the Mango leaf, observing, intently, his altered avatar succumb to the alluring decadence of the Malabar Mango.

Below
Hanuman, ca. 1700,
probably Nurpur,
Northern India,
watercolor and gold
and silver on paper,
from the Coomaras-
wamy Collection.
Image Credit: Museum
of Fine Arts, Boston



Right
Hanuman Carrying
the Mountain, ca. 1850,
Rajasthan, opaque
watercolor and gold on
paper. *Image Credit:*
Christie's London



The valiant *Hanuman*, King of the *Vanaras* (monkeys), was seduced by the pulchritude of the Malabar Mango, and mistook the magnificence of the blazing sun for that of the Mango. Embarking on his journey fuelled by infatuation and lust, *Hanuman* burned himself in the brilliant heat of the sun, unable to separate rationale and his burning desire to taste the Malabar Mango.

Aware of the dangers of the enchanted fruit, *Vishnu*: preserver of the universe, maintains karmic balance with the help of his conspirators: the mango leaves.

Tantrika Painting of a Cross-Legged, Meditating Rishi Aligning his Chakras (the nexus of metaphysical and biophysical energy that reside in the human body), date unknown, opaque watercolor on paper. Image Credit: Wellcome Collection



Rishis and *brahmins* from all over follow in his footsteps on this path of recluse from the Malabar Mango, enshrining their homes with garlands of the mango's leaves, which promise protection from desire, lust and gluttony.

However, in this fated quest, the basal human race has failed to succeed. So seductive is the Malabar Mango, they were unable to resist its temptations.

With the universe conspiring against them in this age of transition, they find themselves crippled at the feet of the mighty Mango, to be active catalysts in the dawn of conflict and sin (the *kali yuga*) in the universe, enslaving humans to their passions and desires.

Tree with Crows sitting on and underneath it, ca.1850, Bundi, opaque watercolor on paper. Next page illustrates the back of the painting with a folktale narrated on it. Image Credit: Victoria and Albert Museum



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१३८
वासा द्वितीय उत्तरायण
ग्रीष्म ऋतु
सप्तमी वृषभ रुद्रायण
काशी विजय
१३९

The mango tree is now an object of the utmost desire. Not for its leaves, the warders of evil and mediators of karmic balance, but for the Malabar Mango itself: the source of all voracity.

The Mango tree is now shielded and cloaked with a murder of crows. The crow, encapsulating the memory of our ancestors, flies down to repeat his treacherous mistakes. Upon seeing the mischief of the Mango, and then his sun-eyed children attempting to guide the world out of the age

of the dark, he sits, perched upon the tree, picking at its leaves, but not once approaching the magnificent Mango that rests in his presence. Finally resisting the temptation of the Mango, the crow reminds us to regain control of our passions, lest we become shackled by gluttony and sensory pleasure.

The parrot, messenger of the divine, is still seen pecking at the Malabar Mango. On his divine mission, he takes one lustrous bite from each Mango in the

Malabar to leave it unworthy of the venal human; reminding him to abandon the misguided quest for the Malabar Mango.

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குட்டகை



*Parakeet, ca. 1880,
Patna, watercolor
on paper, from an
album of Company
School Botanical
Studies by Bahadur
Lal II. Image Credit:
Victoria and Albert
Museum, London*

The Quintessential Madhumālti

YVA



The warm yellow-tinted, dusky summer days of the Indian landscape are intermittently adorned by speckles of white, old rose and cerise five-petaled flowers. These flowers grow over the gnarled fences of abandoned *havelis* (bungalows) and peek out of the iron grills of manholes on every other street. They are the beautiful and delicate *madhumāltis*—*Quisqualis indica*—commonly known as the ‘night-flowering jasmine.’ The beauty of the *madhumālti* is not a recent discovery—the flower is native to the South Asian subcontinent and has been appreciated for centuries. In fact, the *madhumālti* was first seen as the flower pierced in the arrow of *Kamadeva*, the God of Love, in Indian mythology.

Similar to the red rose in the West, *madhumālti* is associated with feelings of love, fascination, and even lust in both Hinduism and Sufism. From the Hindu cupid’s arrow to the *kāvya* works of Sufi origin, the *madhumālti* has been a catalyst for epic love stories. One of the most eclectic encounters of the *madhumālti* was written in the mid-sixteenth century, in Hindavi—a Bihari dialect of Hindi—by a Sufi of the Shattārī order: Shaikh Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Rājgīrī. Later, the poem was translated by the poet Nusrati to Deccani Urdu, a dialect spoken mostly by upper class, elite Muslims at the time, and was illustrated for the first time in the Mughal courts.

This manuscript was titled *Gulshan-i ‘Ishq*: The Rose Garden of Love. It seems, then, that by the time the Hindi poem made its way from the Bihari north to the Deccani south, the symbol of the *madhumālti* was lost in translation and substituted by another flower of love: the rose.

The loss of the *madhumālti* reflects a lack of familiarity with the flower in South India at the time. The *madhumālti* grows in the summer, and is widely prevalent in the north—which has a more amenable climate. Due to the strong showers and storms of the south, the *madhumālti* rarely blossoms there, unlike the rose—an undeterred flower which can withstand harsh climates.



Illustration of Kamadeva with Madhumālti flowers strung in his arrows
Image Credit: Public Domain

No. 94

Quisqualis indica
Combretaceae.

This I first saw in its wild state near Macao, but subsequently found it in the Wood near the Joss House at East Point.

It is a pretty climbing plant and much cultivated in the gardens of the European residents, blooming in the months of June, July.



Though the *madhumālti*'s beauty seems to have evaded the pages of later translations of the poem, some allusions to *Kamadeva* (who is synonymous with the flower itself) seem to have survived, as seen in this translation of the Sufi's poetry from the book '*Madhumālti: An Indian Sufi Romance*':

*Playing I came to that delightful grove,
where the army of the love-god was in full array.
The birds' sweet singing delighted the sense.
Partridges cooed wistfully for their mates.
Here black bees clustered close to the flower,
there cuckoos sang in the fifth note of the scale.
Here tender blossoms opened from the bud,
there, peacocks and cuckoos made their home.
Everywhere there were flowers, colourful and fragrant,
and all through the garden, love's tumultuous ecstasy.
Even bodies which had never known passion would
have been swayed by the sight.
That lovely garden with its army of love would have
aroused desire in the dead.'*



The name *Quisqualis indica* means
'this—that—of India,' referring to the
manner in which the flower changes
color unpredictably.

literary musings

Watercolor Illustration of *Quisqualis indica* (currently accepted name *Combretum indicum*) by William Jackson Hooker. Image Credit: Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew



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கநந.

Moreover, the symbol of the *madhumālti* persists prominently in another form—in the leaflets of the original Deccani folio. The name of the female protagonist in the poem was, coincidentally, Madhumālti. Even though the imagery of the flower faded to the background of the verses, the desire represented by the *madhumālti* could not be extinguished.

Narrated in 539 stanzas, and later illustrated through a series of 97 miniature paintings, this tale is a loving account of the meeting and separation, intense yearning, and longing of the Princess Madhumālti and the Prince Manohar.

Madhumālti is the night-flowering jasmine, and much of the Prince and Princess' love story unravels in the shadows of the night. Their love story commences after the spiritual intervention of the *apsarās*: nymphs or fairies. They arrive one night to transport Prince Manohar to the bedroom of Princess Madhumālti, with whom he fell in love with in a dream. The action of being transported with the wind, guided by the *apsarās* alludes closely to the elegant manner in which the flower, too, spins upon its own axis and flies from one bush to another as it pollinates; giving rise to beauty and abundance with every gush of the wind.



Left

Arguably the finest intact illustrated manuscript of *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* (*Rose Garden of Love*) comprising ninety-six illustrations within a gold embossed leather folio, Deccan Region, India, 1743. Image Credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art



Right

A miniature painting titled 'Fairies Descend to the Chamber of Prince Manohar' from a *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* (*Rose Garden of Love*) folio in which fairies arrive at the Prince's chambers to take him to his Princess, 1743. Image Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art

کہریان ایک کیا تیک چھند ہریاں
اوڑ سقعہ بیر تانک نہیں پریان

ریکھن شاہزادی کون لیہو تو
یکسریاں تی انک چار جلد دھر



بھل

The presence of the *apsarās* indicates the significance of spiritual intervention in the poem, which continues to be an exceedingly important theme in all Sufi romances. The verses contain a plethora of spiritual allusions which suggest that the path to spiritual awakening is often through the soul of the loved one. They expand on how Prince Manohar believes that Princess Madhumālti is his conduit to immorality and the Divine.

Prince Manohar also elevated the Princess to the stature of the Lord himself, by claiming that the

love he feels for her is but a muse for the love and longing which resides within him for the Lord.

Incidentally, The Mother of Pondicherry, a spiritual guide of the 19–20th century, who attributed qualities to over 800 flowers in her lifetime, marked *madhumālti* as the flower of ‘faithfulness.’ She draws our attention to the manner in which the Princess Madhumālti seems to have striking similarities with the intrinsic properties of the flower *madhumālti* itself and symbolizes its most salient qualities in this epic.



*Suffering overwhelmed mankind,
at the very beginning of the creation.
The lotus of Brahma was the home of grief.
The day that sorrow entered creation,
the soul learnt of its own existence.
The pain I feel for you was not born today,
but has been my companion from the beginning.
Now I carry the burden of this grief,
sacrificing all the pleasures of now and hereafter.
I have given myself to you and accepted this pain.
Through dying I have tasted immortality.
O Madhumālati, the pain of love for you,
brings happiness to the world.
Blessed is the life of the man in whose heart
is born the pain of love for you.*



This English translation of the Hindavi, and then Deccani Urdu, manuscript depicts the layers of affection that Prince Manohar feels for his beloved. However, it is hard not to wonder how different the original verses of the poem might sound. In many ways, these translations seem to breathe new life into the poems.

Gulshan-i ‘Ishq blends tropes from Sufi ‘ishq (love) and Hindu *bhakti* (devotion) in a language which mimics the complexity and heterogeneity of South Asian dialects and cultural confluences.

It is immensely important to revisit literary and artistic works which have survived gradual attrition and cultural decay, into works which shine in their own light. One can assume that as stories and works of literature are translated they transform into new and individual pieces of work which, despite being linked to their predecessors, are entirely independent works of art merely due to the act of translation. In the case of the story of Princess Madhumālti and Prince Manohar, the conversion of the *madhumālti* flower to the rose bud is one mere example of the same. A contemporary translation of this illuminated manuscript is discussed on the next page.



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கந்த



Shahzia Sikander

YVA

Pakistani artist Shahzia Sikander presents her own interpretation of conversions, translations, and plurality in perceptions and perspectives.

The animation, '*Disruption as Rapture*', creates an atmospheric, multisensorial experience for any viewer. Sikander, an alumna of Rhode Island School of Design, takes the highly stylized and disciplined forms from the Indo-Persian miniature paintings and challenges the strict formal dogmas of miniature painting (in which she is classically trained) by experimenting with scale, layering, orientation,

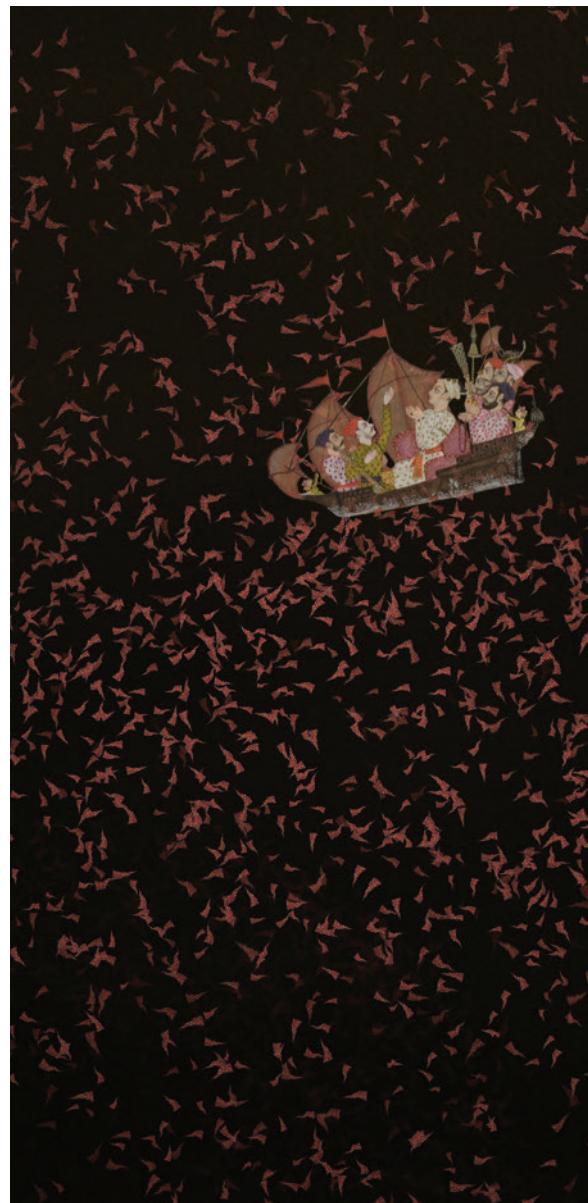
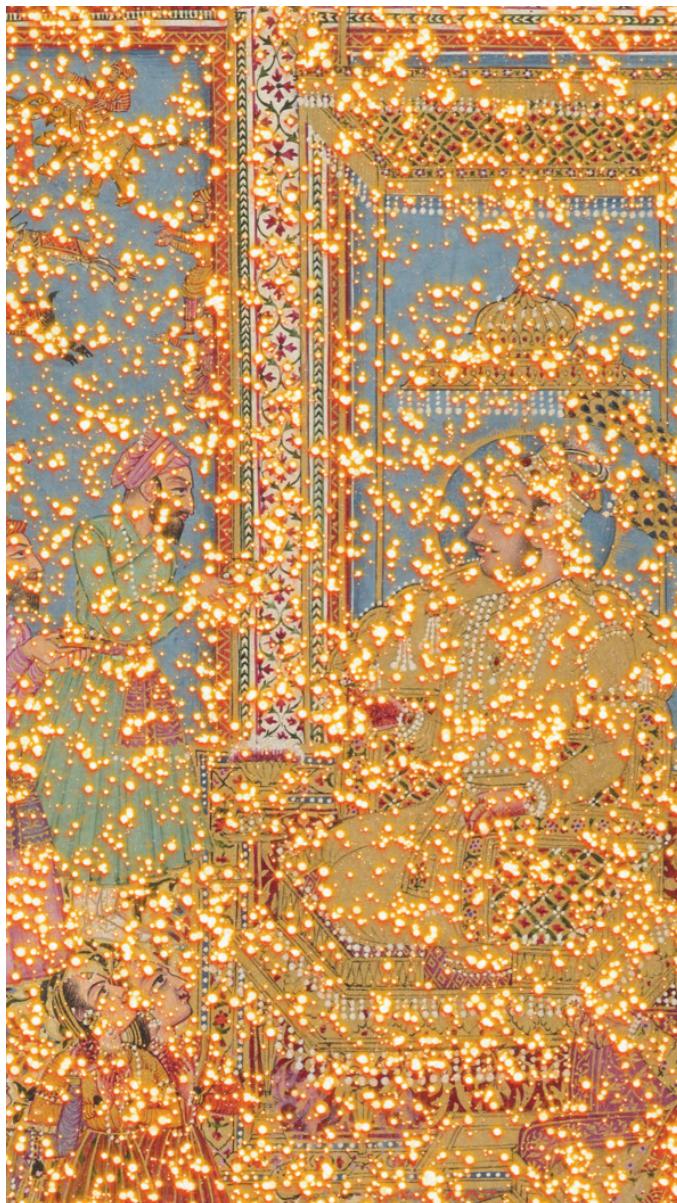


Disruption as Rapture, 2016, Video animation with 7.1 surround sound; 10 minutes 7 seconds; Music by Du Yun featuring Ali Sethi; Animation by Patrick O'Rourke; Commissioned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Image Courtesy: Shahzia Sikander

and new techniques in digital media.

Animation and music enliven the eighteenth-century illuminated manuscript *Gulshan-i ‘Ishq* that illustrates the story of star-crossed lovers surviving the test of painful separations. The deeply meditative animations allude to the metaphor of love as the souls search for the divine. Sikander has layered the animations and maintained a state of constant flux

and transition to refer to the religious and cultural plurality within the universal message of the hybrid Hindu and Sufi tale. Her experimentation, with classical paintings from South Asia, works towards recontextualizing a lost tale, and also raising topical questions surrounding traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and violent geo-cultural politics that divide the region.



பக்தியும்
Amidst
Bhakti & Love
காதலும் ST

Translations from the *Nachiyar Thirumozhi*

தடத்தவிழ் தாமரைப் பொய்கைத்
தாள்கள் எங்காலைக் கதுவ,

*Crimped lotus roots,
Unbind and chafe our legs within the lake!*

விடத்தேள் ஏறிந்தாலே போல
வேதனை ஆற்றவும் பட்டோம்!

*Its thorns stinging us like the poisoned pincers of scorpions,
This is dreadful agony!*

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குடத்தை எடுத்து-ஏற விட்டுக்
சூத்தாட வல்ல எங்கோவே,

கஷக

*You once innocently spread joy,
Performing folk, dancing with pots.*

படிற்றை எல்லாம் தவிர்ந்து எங்கள்
பட்டைப் பணித்தருளாயே!

*My lord, set aside this wickedness!
Please hand us our silken robes!*

കുണ്ടു നീർ ഉരൈ കോൺ അറീ, മത
യാനെ കോൺവിട്ടുതായ്, ഉൻനേൻക

*We envisage you, a majestic lion
Resting upon mystical pools of water.*

കண്ടു മാലുമ്പ് വോന്തക്കാൾക് കത്തെക്
കണ്കാളാലിട്ടു വാഴിയേല്!

*We relive tales of you freeing the aggrieved
Elephant, Gajendra, from the clutches of death.*

വന്നെടൽ നുണ്മണില് തെസ്സി ധാമ് വണ്ണാക്
കൈകാളാല് ചിരമപ്പട്ടോമ്.

*We stare at you, entranced;
You barely requite, a delicate glance
From the fringe of your eye.
Do not harrow us as such!*

തെണ്ണാടരെക് കടത്രപാംസിയായ്, എങ്കാൾ
ചിറ്റില് വന്തു ചിതൈയേലേ!

*Our bangled hands have toiled
greatly to refine soft sand from silt.*

*Dweller of the clear seas, do not batter us with waves,
Do not destroy our sandcastles!*

பெய்யு மாழுகில் போல் வண்ணா! உன்றன்
பேச்சும் செய்தைகயும் எங்களை

*Your adumbral form evokes thought of large storm clouds,
Showering stimulating waters.*

தையல் ஏற்றி மயக்க, உன் முகம்
மாயமந்திரந் தான் கொலோ?

*Your words and acts rain down upon us.
We stand infatuated, spellbound!*

நூய்யர் பிள்ளைகள் என்பதற்கு-உன்னை
நோவ நாங்கள் உரைக்கிலோம்,

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கசந

*Is it your mystic countenance
Casting an incantation?*

செய்யதாமரைக் கண்ணினாய் எங்கள்
சிற்றில் வந்து சிதையேலே!

*We do not plead to pester you,
We are not children of nuisance!*

*Heed attention with your lotus-red eyes
Do not destroy our sandcastles!*

முற்றத்தாடு புகுந்து, நின் முகம்
காட்டிப் புன் முறுவல் செய்து,

*You slink into our inner courtyards
Presenting face of enchanting smile.*

சிற்றிலோடு-எங்கள் சிந்தையும்
சிதைக்கக் கடவையோ கோவிந்தா?

*Do you wish to bewilder our thoughts
as you raze our sandcastles, Govinda?*

முற்ற மண் இடம் தாவி விண்ணுற
நீண்டளந்து கொண்டாய். எம்மைப

*Just as you once lept
To the skies and enclasped earth.*

பற்றி மெய்ப் பிணக்கிட்டக்கால், இந்தப்
பக்கம் நின்றவர் எஞ்சொல்லார்?

*If you now seize me,
Entwining our bodies in embrace.*

What will those around us say?

கோழி அழைப்பதன் முன்னம்
குடைந்து நீராடுவான் போந்தோம்,

*Before the rooster calls, singing its morning song
We have come to dip and bathe.*

ஆழியஞ்செல்வன் எழுந்தான்.
அரவணை மேல் பள்ளி கொண்டாய்,

*The solar disc, born from the sea,
Casts his infantile light - illuminating you,
Who rests upon the serpent throne,
Now here at the shore!*

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கசரு

ஏழைமை ஆற்றவும் பட்டோம்
இனியென்றும் பொய்கைக்கு வாரோம்,

*We stand mortified!
We shall never return to this pool,
My friend and I implore:*

தோழியும் நானும் தொழுதோம்
துகிலைப் பணித்தருளாயே!

Please hand us our garb!

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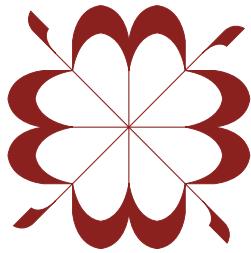
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designed

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400 copies were produced using Orpheus
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Devanagari and Brando Arabic typefaces.



The pattern is a marriage of the traditions of *kolam* (floor murals made using rice powder) from the South and *jali* (Arabic-inspired stone curtains that are carved into arches and windows) from the North—the two most dominant aesthetic cultures from South Asia that comprise a multitude of sub-cultures and identities.





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